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NOVEMBER, 1916

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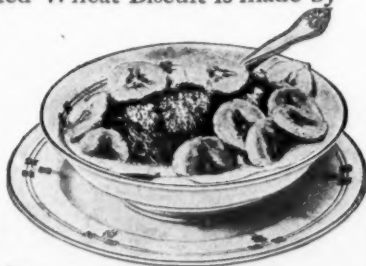


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AINSLEE'S

VOL. XXXVIII.

NOVEMBER, 1916.

No. 4.



The Affairs of Fentress

By Kate Trimble Sharber

Author of "The Beloved Transgressor,"
"Children of the Sun," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Mrs. Alice St. John returned to her South, after twenty-five years of absence, and settled down in the mushroom city of Manchester, she expected that some few questions would be asked, perhaps, but she was disappointed. Things had changed; Manchester was a sort of Jack-and-the-beanstalk affair in which nobody had time to think of the past.

Alice St. John had been left a widow before she was twenty, and the following year she had left her home town of Buena Vista, Mississippi, and had gone to Europe as an "artistic interpreter of the South," meeting with instant success. She could sing a little, dance a little, act a little—and she had been as lovely as a Spaniard's dream of an angel. She had made money—which she had invested in iron-ore lands in her native South—and had been able to send many handsome pictures of herself back to her little daughter, Miriam, who was being reared under the care of the elder St. Johns.

Miriam had grown up a great beauty, dark and vivid like her mother, and while still in her teens, had married

Paul Bedford, a young man destined to rise with the growth of the iron industry about Buena Vista. The pair had moved to Manchester after Paul had gained a financial foothold, and at the time when Mrs. St. John elected to return and spend her declining years at home, they were living in expensive simplicity on one of the fashionable pikes. Alice asked their advice about the purchase of a town house, and they helped her select one, Miriam strongly opposing her husband's generous suggestion that her mother should make her home with them.

Alice's return, to tell the truth, had not been as great a success as she had anticipated, for she found that her daughter was not in the least what she had expected. Miriam had none of her mother's aptitude for "mixing," and was a little somber and Puritanical, like the St. Johns; and Paul was eternally busy, as busy as an American husband in an English comic weekly. He was considerate of his handsome, celebrated mother-in-law, but he was inclined to tease her a little about her artistic career in Europe; indeed, the keynote of his relations with her, as

with most of the outside world, was laughter. He was an absorbed, good-tempered, indifferent chap, a good business man, devoted to his wife and indolent toward the rest of mankind.

"Why, you have to laugh at Alice St. John," he told Miriam once, in answer to a remonstrance from her. "If you begin to blush for her, you'll end by having a cerebral hemorrhage. She's only an accidental mother to you, anyhow."

But Miriam was not convinced that things should ever be allowed to slip by so easily—serious things.

"Alec is only an accidental brother to you, too, but he keeps you on the jump," she reminded him. "And my mother makes me hold my breath half the time."

Miriam Bedford was really a very "correct" woman, without being a prude; and Paul thought it was her exquisite taste in everything that caused her to take Mrs. St. John's return so much to heart. Except for this point of extreme delicacy, the two women were alike; both were beauties, both dressed well, both were somewhat inclined to pose. Alice smoked and drank with fine taste, while Miriam read poetry and cultivated a flock of pigeons at her country home. She had trained the pigeons to come and rest on her head and outstretched arms—a Rossetti or Burné-Jones conception—and one could never quite shake off the impression that her dramatic instinct was the most vital thing about her. She was a good wife to Paul, however, and extremely kind-hearted in general.

To-day, for instance—the day on which this story begins—her kindness of heart was causing her to suffer real pain, and she was bearing it for the sake of Paul's niece, Margaret Bedford, who, with Alec, her scamp father, was up from Buena Vista for a visit with their city relatives.

They were lunching with Mrs. St.

John, who had had the bad taste to invite Victor Fentress, a visiting celebrity, to the family meal; and now they had been kept waiting an hour on his account! Miriam was much inclined to show her disgust by pleading an early engagement for the afternoon, but she knew that Margaret was very keen on catching a glimpse of this man whom the newspapers and ladies' clubs had been honoring all winter, so she waited. Her restlessness after a while grew so apparent, however, that Mrs. St. John began to grow uneasy. She walked over to the window and looked out.

"Five minutes more, and if he's not here, we'll eat without him," she declared, smiling on her guests in a pacifying way. "Give him that much time—do!"

"I suppose the soup's already ruined, so five minutes more won't matter," answered her daughter pointedly. "I shouldn't know what to do in a case like this. Just have a fresh luncheon cooked up every hour and served on demand, I suppose."

Paul Bedford looked from his perturbed wife to his placid mother-in-law and smiled. He really felt a little like shaking Miriam for taking it so seriously. If Alice St. John chose to make herself a fool over Victor Fentress, it was no more than the other Manchester women had been doing all winter.

"The later he comes, the less we'll have to talk to him about his books," he threw in, rising and shaking himself as if he had just waked from a nap. "Lord, I'm hungry! Next time I'm invited to lunch alongside Mr. Fentress, I'm going to bring a pocketful of malted-milk tablets."

Alice St. John laughed; then looked at Margaret Bedford.

"You're willing to wait, aren't you, dear?"

The girl smiled, excitement in her eyes. She was a fresh-colored young

thing, wearing her costly gown badly, but having the charm of youth and good breeding; not especially pretty, but wholesome and sturdy looking. Her face had a certain brooding look that girls sometimes wear when they have had the care of a flock of younger brothers and sisters, but those who knew her well knew that Alec Bedford was her care. Her mother had died five years before, and she had taken on the task of watching over him.

"Mercy, yes, I'm willing to wait," she answered, as Alice St. John looked at her encouragingly. "I'd do without soup, salad, and dessert for a glimpse of Victor Fentress."

"And for that sweet speech, I'm going to place him beside you at table," volunteered the hostess generously.

"That is, if he comes," amended her son-in-law.

"Oh, he'll come," avowed Alice. "It's only crushes he hates—big things. He knows that this is only a family party."

"Which is the very reason he'd hate to come," Miriam could not forbear suggesting, as the tedium of the waiting was rather strongly brought home to them at that moment by a gentle snore from Alec Bedford on his corner sofa. "We're all home folk—Alec even gone to sleep——"

The laugh broke into the bitterness of the young woman's complaint, but Margaret Bedford took up the subject timidly.

"I'm a little like Aunt Miriam," she confessed, after giving her father a poke in the side that roused him at once. "While we are all eagerness to meet Mr. Fentress, I'm afraid he won't find anything interesting in us. We'll seem pretty commonplace sort of people to him—and he'll be angry with Mrs. St. John."

"That shows how young you are," returned Alice, coming over and pat-

ting the girl affectionately on the shoulder. "He came South to get material for his next book, my dear, and therefore he wants to meet Southerners. If he'd cared to meet theatrical stars and literary lights, he'd have stayed in New York. He's been terribly disappointed in Manchester so far—says the women all seem to have been educated at Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson, and the men don't know anything but pig iron and land values around the golf club."

"Oh, and he wants the picturesque lunatic and the starving genius, I suppose?" asked Paul Bedford. "He wants the educated beggar who prefers staying on the old plantation——"

"I wonder what he'd pay me to pose?" broke in Alec Bedford, yawning lazily as he straightened up and found another sofa cushion to place behind his back. "Do writers give so much an hour to their models, as artists do? I certainly need the money."

"Your walnut logs having about petered out?" asked his brother with gentle sarcasm, as he recalled Alec's explanation of the sudden affluence to which his and Margaret's clothes testified. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, selling material for gun-stocks!"

Everybody laughed, Margaret included. Her father's mania for gambling was too well known not to be acknowledged openly, but there was anxiety in her eyes as Alec disclaimed the deed.

"I swear I haven't touched a card—or gone near a race horse—or looked at a cotton report——"

"We know! We believe that you've really made money selling walnut logs," laughed Paul good-naturedly, and any one watching Margaret would have seen that she was watching her father. Her scrutiny was so close and intense, so wondering and absorbed, that she scarcely started as the doorbell suddenly pealed.

"Ah, there he is at last!"

Mrs. St. John met the new guest at the threshold, and his apologies, if he made any, were spoken in tones too low to be caught by the others.

"If the soup is ruined, we'll just do without," said Mrs. St. John easily, as she gave Fentress time to greet her daughter and son-in-law before introducing him to the Buena Vista pair. "We're just a cozy family party."

CHAPTER II.

But the feast to which they sat down, a short while later, was far from being a cozy family meal, and Miriam could not refrain from glancing at Fentress as the table, with its elaborate arrangement, foreshadowed what was to come.

"I wonder—— No, it isn't possible that she intends anything important to happen," she thought waveringly, as she stole puzzled glances alternately at her mother and at the man who was so clearly the honor guest. "Yet I couldn't be surprised at anything she'd do. While as for him——"

Perhaps fifty times during that winter, Miriam Bedford had looked at Victor Fentress appraisingly, wondering not so much wherein lay the power he possessed to cause women to make fools of themselves over him as what was the weak spot in his armor. He was an alert, cocksure young man, who looked about thirty-five, although she knew that he was only thirty, and he possessed all the outward qualifications of the heartbreaker. He was very good looking, with the vivid black-and-white coloring we find sometimes in the modern Greeks, and he had the perfection of feature given to a man who never did any useful work in his life. His face showed the power of thought, but the smoothness of the forehead proved that that power had lain dormant. Life had been easy for him; his books had been written from the

surface of things and read by people who wished to see only the surface. He had made some money, but not a fortune, and there were hints now that his vogue was passing. War and rumors of war had caused his stuff to show up in its true weakness, and the inference was that he would either go to work in earnest or marry a rich woman who could afford to let him go on scribbling.

Naturally enough, the question that burned itself into Miriam Bedford's brain was whether or not her mother would be the rich woman he would marry; and lately she had begun to shudder over the thought of the engagement's being announced. It was so hideous a thought that she dreaded to open the Sunday papers; she dreaded to meet Alice St. John face to face, although she felt sure that the secret would never reach her in a natural, confidential way; she dreaded particularly such an affair as this present luncheon, where the news might be blazoned forth shamelessly.

"Oh, the harpies, the asinine, gluttonous old harpies who are so greedy for youth that they buy themselves young husbands with money!" Miriam thought.

She felt that when the announcement came, she would certainly leave Manchester. It was sickening, and she could not endure it.

Meanwhile, the other luncheon guests began to grow lively, when it was seen that the soup was not spoiled. Indeed, as course followed course, everybody's tongue loosened. Paul Bedford, with nothing of his wife's feeling, devoted himself to the splendid feast, and declared that he expected to see Mrs. St. John dissolve a pearl in a glass of vinegar and drink it, as a crowning feature.

Miriam hated display, and when the ice course came on, her cheeks flamed suddenly with rage and she felt that her darkest fears were about to be

proven true. The individual ices were frozen in the forms of small white horses, winged horses, with prancing mien; and the little cakes were book-shaped, chocolate letters spelling out the name of the last novel by Victor Fentress. She glanced again at Fentress, but he was smiling.

"At last you've put this brute in my power," he said, looking at his hostess in pleased surprise. "Who'd ever thought I'd eat Pegasus whole?"

Mrs. St. John was attacking an outspread wing with her fork, her face showing only housewifely pride. Miriam's hopes rose again.

"No, they're not engaged yet. She's only running after him—but she's running at a frightful speed! Oh, heavens! What can I do to stop her?"

Back in the drawing-room, after Turkish coffee had been served, Miriam took a sudden and rather hazardous resolution. All winter she had held herself aloof from the company of women who groveled before the visiting potentate, but it came to her now that she had done the wrong thing. She ought to get acquainted with him. She ought to make much of him, flatter him—win him, in short—to the end that he might confide in her. Whether he married her mother or not, it could do no harm for her to unbend to him a little—and it might do worlds of good. She might even be able to exert some influence over him—let him see what a hideous thing he was doing in encouraging this middle-aged woman to woo him.

Mrs. St. John was intrenched behind the coffee tray, and, as Fentress set his empty cup down, he ignored the sign his hostess made that he might draw up a chair close beside the little table, and looked about him. He had divided his attentions between Mrs. St. John and Margaret Bedford at table, and he clearly wanted a change. The natural thing was for him to find a place beside

Mrs. Bedford. She had always been distant with him, but to-day—

He looked at her, a flicker of inquiry in his long, dark eyes, and she sent back a smile, half inviting, half indifferent.

"Isn't it a joy to have a party like this on Sunday?" she asked, as he placed his chair at once beside her, and sat down. "It takes away all the sleepiness of Sunday afternoon."

"It's certainly a joy to have a party like this on any day. But I don't ever spend sleepy Sundays."

"No? You live in New York, though, and Paris—wicked places. You see, I've never lived anywhere except in Buena Vista and this place."

He made a grimace expressive of his sympathy, and they both smiled. It was the nearest approach to a friendly passage they had ever had.

"Well, if Buena Vista is any more commonplace than Manchester—" he began, and a look of hopelessness directed out of the window forcibly conveyed his sentiments. "Do you know, I thought the South would be full of the atmosphere I wanted—really feared I might be asphyxiated by it? But instead of that I've found Manchester a little Pittsburgh. The people here have been so kind that I haven't wanted to get away and try it anywhere else; but I find that I'm getting nothing."

"You're looking for pastel shades—and you find poster splotches?"

He shot her a quick glance of surprise, but he nodded.

"Exactly. I hope you don't think I'm rude?"

"Not at all," she replied. "I'd think you very rude to say anything against Buena Vista, except that it is a sleepy little place—and that's the truth—but say what you please against Manchester. It's not my home, you see."

"So you love Buena Vista? It sounds musical—Buena Vista, Mississippi." He repeated the rippling syllables; then

called over two or three other names that had clung to his memory—Sylla-cauga, Alabama, Talladega, Tuscaloosa. "I wish I could get to know them, really know their spirit," he wound up fretfully.

The woman gave a faint laugh.

"Knowing the spirit of a place always seemed an awful humbug to me," she observed, opening and closing her big fan lazily. "Aren't human beings the same everywhere?"

Fentress was slow in answering.

"Perhaps," he finally admitted. "The sun seems to dwindle the conscience a little—don't you think so? And grimness of environment seems to harden one's spirit of devotion?"

Miriam shook her head vigorously.

"No. I haven't traveled about the world as much as you have, but I've had my eyes wide open while I was traveling. I've seen Mohammedans in Cairo just as devout as Presbyterians in Glasgow. It's a question of age—and temperament, perhaps—rather than geography. I believe that most people are somewhat wicked when they're young."

"And are suitably punished when they're old?"

She puckered her lips contemptuously.

"Never. The women grow fat, the men grow bald—and they both wear ugly shoes."

Instinctively Miriam's eyes rested on her mother's cherubic face, and Alice looked up from the coffee cups as she heard Victor Fentress laugh.

"What are you two talking about?" she inquired, rising and crossing the room to where they sat. "Come, Alec—Margaret! Miriam's telling things about Buena Vista that make Mr. Fentress split his sides. Let's hear what she says."

Miriam kept her position of lazy grace in her big chair, but her fingers nervously clutched the handle of her

fan as her mother drew the other members of the party about her and Victor Fentress.

"I was saying that the pine trees grow in poetic aisles down there, and that's where the name, Buena Vista, comes in," she said, a certain cool insolence in her manner showing the disgust she felt for Mrs. St. John's surveillance. "It struck Mr. Fentress as being very funny."

The man inclined his head gravely, and Miriam felt that in that slight gesture a sort of compact had been established between her and Fentress. It was plain that he resented Mrs. St. John's interruption at the moment, and was eager to help Miriam hoodwink her.

Alice looked from one to the other stupidly, for an instant. Then the easy optimism that had marked every move of her life came to her aid. Her pang of uneasiness passed.

"I wish to Heaven I could see something in Buena Vista to call poetic—or funny, either!" she exclaimed, drawing a deep sigh. And as she looked at Alec Bedford, he nodded sympathetically.

"You and me both," he answered, with his ready slang. "It's the most God-forsaken hole on earth. I wish I knew I'd never have to take another peep through those poetic aisles."

Paul Bedford had lingered at the far end of the room, where a batch of morning papers lay scattered over a table; but as he heard his brother's fervent remark, he dropped the sheet in his hand and strolled over to join the group.

"Shut up, Alec!" he exclaimed, motioning Margaret to make room for him beside her on a small sofa. "I hate to hear a fellow eternally running down his town! As a matter of fact, Buena Vista suits you better than any plate on earth. You're part and parcel of it. You couldn't live anywhere else

—unless you should go to Russia and have yourself appointed czar.”

Margaret joined faintly in the laugh that greeted this frank opinion, but she saw that Fentress was looking at Paul with a glimmer of interest in his dark eyes.

“You mean it’s really an oligarchy?” he demanded. “A place where the ‘best people’ are supreme?”

“Yes. A Bedford, a St. John, a Fletcher, a Nance, a Russell—these can do no wrong.”

“How interesting!”

Paul Bedford gave a short laugh, flicking the ash from his cigar.

“Very interesting—for the Bedfords, Russells, and so forth.”

“But this is not a ‘Southern’ condition only,” Miriam said, as she straightened up suddenly in her chair and looked at her husband with flashing eyes. “I won’t have my home place maligned. Remember Philadelphia, please, where they have ‘Biddle for breakfast.’”

Fentress smiled, ran his hand into his breast pocket, then shook his head.

“I haven’t my notebook with me, Mrs. Bedford,” he said, “so I can’t take all this down. But please go on. I promise not to work it up against the South.”

He looked at Paul, but Alec was quick with his intent to shift the subject.

“There’s nothing to tell,” he declared, as if insisting upon the point. “Paul won’t let me abuse it, you see, but he abuses it the worst way by saying I’m its product. It’s a mountainous country about there, and Buena Vista is as sloping as an Italian vineyard. My home looks out against a peak, the road being between——”

“And, oh”—Miriam bent forward, interrupting eagerly—“just across is the old Locke place—a haunted house—and its kitchen door opens squarely against the mountain! If the cook

threw out the dishwater, it splattered back and hit her in the face.”

Fentress laughed, shaking his head again in a lugubrious way as he felt in his pocket for his notebook.

“My word! And does the ghost have to drag his chains through the underbrush?” he asked. “As a ghost isn’t indigenous to the South, you can tell me about him.”

“The ghost is a lady, named Miss Eva Locke, and her lover was killed at the battle of Chickamauga,” chimed in Alice St. John, before Miriam had time to answer. “I know that story better than this younger crowd, I’m sure, although Alec may have seen her last—— Why, Alec!”

She had looked around at Alec Bedford in gay appeal, but she saw that his face had grown suddenly dark and that his hands were fumbling nervously in their effort to light a cigar. Mrs. St. John broke into a peal of merriment.

“Why, Alec—you must believe in Miss Eva!” she accused, and Paul joined in the charge.

“I’m not surprised at anything he believes—living like a hermit out there,” he began, but as he looked at Margaret, he saw that the girl had grown a trifle pale. “Why, what’s the matter, kitten? You’re not afraid of poor Miss Eva?”

The young girl shook her head, collecting herself instantly. She glanced across the circle at Fentress.

“Miss Eva Locke hasn’t ‘walked’ since the house has been abandoned, ten years ago—maybe longer than that,” she explained, her voice a little tremulous from shyness. “But the negroes are mortally afraid of the place—and the ignorant white people, too!”

“You couldn’t pay anybody in Buena Vista a thousand dollars to go near the place at night,” Paul Bedford threw in, glancing at his brother’s perturbed face with a tinge of amusement. “How about it, Alec? You’re always saying

you're hard up—but, honestly, would you go near the Locke place at night for a cool thousand?"

Alec Bedford had succeeded in lighting his cigar, and he now leaned back in his chair, clouds of smoke concealing his face somewhat from the amused scrutiny directed toward it.

"Don't you think we might entertain Mr. Fentress as well if we discussed something else?" he asked, in answer to his brother's jest. "He likely hears ghost stories everywhere he goes—and really Miss Eva is pretty commonplace."

"Very commonplace," agreed Mrs. St. John, as if she, too, were more than ready to change the subject from Buena Vista. "She lost her mind when her lover was killed; then later she committed suicide in a cave somewhere in the mountains back of the town. The other Lockes all died or moved away—and when the house began to look gloomy enough to justify it, the ghost story was hatched up."

She spoke with a little sweeping air of finality, and Alec Bedford looked at her gratefully.

"That's right," he commended, his impudent eyes losing their expression of fretful anxiety. "I hate to see the South written up in the 'moony' way the public loves—aristocrats filled with chivalry, old servants filled with loyalty, young daughters filled with levity! Ghosts! Bah!"

Fentress laughed.

"I agree heartily, Mr. Bedford," he said. "I grit my teeth every time I run across a 'Colonel Beverley Lee whose word is as good as his bond.' He's been greatly overworked, poor old man."

"And yet," Miriam broke in thoughtfully, "so far as chivalry is concerned, we have it. There's no question about that 'local color'—and I glory in it."

"But it's not confined to the educated classes," Margaret amended; "the

only kind ever mentioned in stories. The most chivalrous man I've ever known—the greatest idealist—is old Mr. White, sheriff of our county. He keeps even his own wife and daughter on a pedestal."

"And keeps you there particularly, miss, because you got the silly little daughter a job as teacher in the grammar school," her father reminded her. "Still, I admit he's a decent old cuss. Margaret, you know," addressing Mrs. St. John, "is democratic. If she lived in a city, she'd be a slum lifter."

Alice smiled benignly at the girl as Alec began to extol her virtues as a "mixer" in words full of light mockery; and Fentress saw that he was veering farther and farther away from the ghost story all the while. Evidently the mention of the old tale nettled him, but Fentress was not sure that it was because of the stigma on Southern intelligence.

"Does he really believe that Miss Eva walks, or does the story affect property values thereabouts?" he asked Mrs. Bedford in a low tone a few minutes later, when the recital of one of Margaret's philanthropic exploits had created a general laugh. "It's certain that he doesn't enjoy talking about it."

Miriam looked at him for an instant in puzzled wonder.

"Mr. Alec Bedford—and the Locke ghost," he explained. "Surely you noticed that he didn't enjoy talking about it."

She smiled, shaking her head decisively.

"Of course he doesn't believe it, but it naturally irritates him to hear it talked about as if it were true. You see, the old Bedford home and this abandoned Locke place are some little distance out of town, and are quite isolated. I suppose Alec thinks it's the ghost story that keeps them from getting good neighbors there."

"Or from selling his own place to advantage?"

"No-o—that's entailed on Margaret——" She paused; then smiled a little deprecatingly. "Alec is our family 'baby,' and my father-in-law had to provide against any childish folly; so the homestead was left to Margaret——"

She broke off uncertainly. To tell more would be in bad taste, but to have told less would have been awkward, under the circumstances. She consoled herself quickly with the thought that Alec Bedford's handsome, dissipated face told its own story. Nobody could look at him and not realize that he was one of those creatures who will stay unniched and untabulated in the social system until the end of time—too clever and charming to be classed as a "hobo," too frank mannered to be considered a scoundrel—and far too unstable for any thought of confidence.

"Are he and Miss Bedford here for a long visit?" Fentress asked, his voice dropping a trifle lower as he put the question. "I should like very much to hear more about Buena Vista, when our talk would not annoy Mr. Bedford. Perhaps you'd let me call on you—if I promised not to bring my notebook?"

His face, when he smiled, was very brilliant; and as he made this suggestion, there was a note of proffered friendliness in his manner. Miriam Bedford realized that it was not often he proffered friendliness to any one, and the thought gave her a delightful little sensation of power. Her languid eyes, however, held no hint of this as she raised them to his face.

"Alec is leaving in the morning," she answered, "but we're trying to keep Margaret for a longer stay. She and I will be delighted to talk Buena Vista with you, I'm sure."

He bowed gravely.

"To-morrow—please? About eleven? I don't want to lose time, you see."

She smiled, indifferently enough, but

the hint of precipitation in his manner charmed her. She adored the original, whimsical type of man who dared to do any mad thing he liked.

"You flatter—Buena Vista," she said, raising her eyes to him slowly. "But we'll expect you to-morrow at eleven."

CHAPTER III.

Paul approved, indifferently, when Miriam mapped out her course to him. On the whole, it seemed better to cultivate the fellow a little than to ignore him, particularly as Alice seemed bent on her folly. But it really didn't matter—nothing connected with Mrs. St. John and her future life greatly concerned them. Everybody knew that Miriam had been forsaken as a child, and that the maternal rôle had been taken up at this late day partly through caprice, partly because Alice had valuable holdings in Manchester. Why not face the thing as it was, acknowledging that the tie between them was a mere thread?

"You really stress the matter of relationship by objecting so fiercely to what she does," he pointed out, as the puzzled look in his wife's eyes seemed to plead for a little more consideration than he was at the moment giving. "A daughter might feel this sense of shame over her mother's idiocy if there'd been love between them—idealization—that sort of thing—but it's not natural for you to feel so keenly over what Alice St. John does. She wasn't anything to you during your childhood but a newspaper story and a beautiful photograph."

They were just leaving the breakfast room, and Paul was in a hurry to reach his car, which was waiting at a side entrance. But Miriam took some pains to detain him. She was dressed in a morning gown of some light-blue material, soft, but at the same time thick and pliant, and her dark hair was

so simply arranged that Paul had exclaimed, upon catching his first sight of her that morning:

"My lady, you look like an angel on an Easter card!"

"Don't go yet! You're always in a hurry! And with people in the house, we get no chance to discuss things. I'm glad Margaret chose to drive alone with her father to the station this morning, for I'd been so keen to tell you what I've been thinking."

She slipped her arm in his, but he instantly drew it up about his neck and placed his arm around her. He would have kissed her, but she pushed him back.

"You're not listening!" she cried fretfully.

"No—I'm loving."

"You're not the least interested in this horrible business!"

He smiled.

"Neither are you—really. I mean, you're taking the burden on your shoulders partly because you're curious! Now—don't be angry, darling—but you know this is true. Alice St. John and Victor Fentress are a pair of strangers to us; what they do can't affect us materially. But you, with your scruples, your delicacy——"

She drew away from him, her tall, slim figure outlined in the opened doorway; and it seemed to him that every fiber of her was suddenly alive and quivering.

"You think I'm posing, then?" she demanded, her dark face swept with sudden color. "I'm interested in these two just because I'm idle—and restless? That my mother—my mother——"

"You and your mother hate each other," Paul interrupted, not harshly, but with firmness; and his manner showed that he took considerable satisfaction in the fact. "She hates you for proving her age, and you hate her because she's a fraud. The newspaper story and the handsome photograph

you used to have brightened the dull years of the St. John régime—but these didn't last. She disappointed you."

The woman was silent for a moment, her hands lying inert in her husband's warm clasp; but when she spoke, Paul saw that her feeling was still high.

"She disappointed me—she's a fraud.—yes. I admit all that, and the horrible feeling I have against her now. But this only proves to me that she'll disappoint Victor Fentress some day. He'll find out that she's a fraud, and then——"

She was so deeply in earnest that Paul Bedford could not laugh, but he managed to interrupt her at this point by a blank, unbelieving stare. He brought his face down to a level with hers, astonishment in his eyes.

"Miriam! Great heavens! Surely you don't think that Fentress is a victim?"

She nodded her head.

"Since yesterday I do think so," she admitted solemnly, as if the gravity of her words might make them more convincing to her husband. "Before then, I'd thought him the incarnation of evil—but I've changed my mind. I think now he's a fine young man—on the wrong track. He believes that Alice St. John is a handsome, big-hearted optimist, and that marrying her would not be a dreadful thing. I—I wish somebody would step in and save him."

This time Paul laughed, but it was not a laugh of ridicule. He took his wife in his arms and chuckled over her fondly, indulgently—as a woman chuckles over some wild whim of her youngster.

"You're a babe," he declared, kissing her ear, but at the same time making some movement toward freeing himself and starting toward his car. "You're an infant. Anybody could sell you a gold brick! Now, sweetheart, I've got to go. You and Margaret have a good time this morning out in this sunshine.

And stop worrying your head over Fentress and his innocence. I wish you'd make Willard hoe the grass out of the canna bed and plant those late bulbs."

Miriam released him reluctantly, following him to the car.

"He's coming out here this morning—I told you that?" she asked, and her husband nodded indifferently.

"Yes—you and Margaret entertain him out here somewhere. I wouldn't let any man alive keep me shut up indoors on a day like this."

At the turn of the road just inside the gate, he slowed down a bit for the purpose of leaning forward and waving a last good-by to his wife. She waved in return, then was starting back slowly toward the door when she was arrested by the sound of another car. Margaret, in a big roadster driven by a ubiquitous young negro servant, was just returning from the station, and Miriam waited for her. The young girl had dressed very hurriedly an hour or more ago, and as they met now, Mrs. Bedford laughed and called attention to a badly tied scarf around Margaret's neck.

"Oh, you harum-scarum child! Come here and let me fix you!"

But the girl shook her head vigorously, as she linked her arm within Miriam's and they walked into the house together.

"There's no use fixing this dress any better when I'm going to change right away," she pronounced with enthusiasm. "I'm going to put on my embroidered pongee or my——"

Mrs. Bedford stopped short, interrupting the confidential burst.

"You little goose! You're going to put on some simple morning gown that won't let that conceited man know you were thinking of him!" she declared stoutly, looking down at her own plain dress with meaning in her eyes. "I shan't change again, I'm sure."

Margaret stepped back a pace and

looked with lively admiration at her uncle's wife.

"You couldn't look more beautiful," she avowed, her honest eyes glowing with pleasure over their feast. "In that plain blue gown, with the gray pigeons perching all along your graceful arms—why, you'll look like Saint Something! I know Mr. Fentress will think so."

Miriam gave a little gesture of disdain.

"Simpleton! Surely you don't think I'm going to show off my pigeons to him, do you?"

"Why, of course! You never look so lovely as when you're feeding them and they're fluttering all about your head."

"But Mr. Fentress isn't coming out here to admire me—or even you, with all the arrogance of your twenty years. He's coming to have us talk to him about Buena Vista—Buena Vista, Mississippi." She repeated the name lingeringly, as Fentress had repeated it the day before; then wound up sharply: "It's a business proposition with him, my dear."

Margaret's face fell.

"Is it? But—well, he's a man, just the same, and he has eyes."

"However, he's not susceptible to women, so you needn't try to flirt with him."

Her aunt spoke so convincingly that Margaret's face held a stricken look for a while. Meeting Victor Fentress the day before had been the biggest event of the year to her, but she had been acute enough to feel from the very first that he was not an impressionable sort of man. Glowing as he was, and vital, there was something hard as flint in his manner. He was cocksure, but at the same time discontented. His face, his arrogant, dissatisfied face, seemed to say:

"Oh, yes, I'm at daggers' points with

life—but don't get it into your head that *you* could help me!"

And this very attitude of his stirred up everything maternal in Margaret's heart—that is, everything left over from her brooding care of Alec Bedford. She had thought about Fentress nearly every minute since noon the day before, but she was far too humble to imagine that she could ever have a flirtation with him. On the other hand, her very humility gave her a certain degree of latitude in thinking about him; her imagination ran immense distances because she knew that reality would never give her an inch.

"Aunt Miriam!"

The two women had tarried for a little while in the hall, but Mrs. Bedford was about to move on toward the rear of the house on some household matter when Margaret stopped her abruptly.

"Aunt Miriam, please don't think I'm a fool—but I've been so worried about father lately that this visit has been a godsend to me! And Mr. Fentress"—she hesitated, flushing as she felt Miriam's eyes resting curiously upon her—"he's just somebody to think about after I go home. You can't help thinking about him, you know—he's so vital, so like a dynamo. I think I should know instantly if he came into a room where I was—even without seeing him or hearing his voice. He sends out vibrations—somehow——"

Miriam tried to laugh, but her quick breath had something like a gasp of astonishment in it.

"It's an epidemic, Margaret—an epidemic!" she cried, a mocking gayety hiding a faint uneasiness in her voice. "But for Heaven's sake, don't let him know! Run along now and put on another dress, if you must—but don't expect him to notice."

Miriam went about her Monday-morning household affairs with her usual brisk thoroughness, and if she

lingered in the library an unwarranted length of time over the flower vases and the exact placing of the window curtains, nobody noticed.

This room was her very own sanctum, and, far better than any other part of the house, it expressed her manner of thinking. It was not immensely large, but its appearance was one of great space, the pieces of furniture being few and so placed as to give that effect. The ceiling was beamed, and the walls wainscoted, in dull oak; the long table was of a Jacobean model, and the half dozen chairs were tall-backed and cushioned in dark-green tapestry. Tall, slender candlesticks stood on the table, bookcases, and mantelpiece, all holding white wax tapers. There was little other effort after decoration. The windows at one end of the room gave a view of the smoky city in the distance, and at the other end showed an avenue of cedars leading toward the gates on the little park around the house, thus in a manner forming a vista.

"Vista" was a word Miriam Bedford loved, and its motif had been brought into play extensively in her home. The drawing-room, which was austere and handsome, had two great mirrors reflecting each other endlessly; the cedar avenue already mentioned showed from the gate only a tantalizing bit of the Spanish arches that faced the front portico; and even upstairs in the bedrooms, where there was allowed a riot of warm mahogany and gay chintz, the wall paper, as Paul expressed it, "took you on a trip." In all the apartments it was grayish white, with sepia tracings of mountains and valleys, crooked trees showing in the foreground and far-off lakes in the distance.

The manner of furnishing her home told pretty much all there was to tell about Miriam Bedford—that she had a taste at once exquisite and bizarre, a tormenting aspiration after spiritual

heights—and a loathing for everything that was common, real, and prosaic.

Compared with this calm-looking home, Alice St. John's, with its rich Eastern gewgaws and close-set city proportions, was oppressive and exhausting. She gave you a dozen beautiful objects to keep you occupied, it is true, but Miriam gave you a dozen cool channels for your thoughts. She stopped you short at every turn and diverted you with something fresh; Miriam gave you free rein, with nothing but mystic shadows to lead you on.

"I wonder if he'll see the difference—if he will know that she and I live in different worlds," Miriam kept thinking all the morning.

Fentress came on the stroke of eleven, dressed in a trim suit of gray mohair and swinging up the cedar avenue with a vigorous step. The two women were seated on the portico, embroidery hoops in hand, but he protested against the shelter even of the Spanish arches, as they offered him a chair beside them.

"Can't we stay out in the open?" he demanded, after he had deposited his hat and stick on the balustrade and had looked about him with a deep breath of relief for the shade. "I walked out from town, you see, and the sun's hot—even if it is only April. Can't we walk around and see the sights?"

Miriam smiled. He was still in his mood of yesterday, and his boyish demand pleased her.

"Certainly we will. Choose the spot you like best. We have everything here that Disraeli had at Hughenden."

His face lighted, and she expected him to exclaim, "Peafowls!" But he surprised her; whereat she was very grateful.

"I'm sure you haven't," he denied, looking about him with quiet approval at the shady lawn. "At Hughenden, two women loved a man, and the man

loved himself. You'd never have anything like that. But, if you please, I'd enjoy seeing the peafowls."

Margaret got her hat, then followed the pair down the gravel walk, her face showing that she was somewhat bewildered over their whimsical talk. Fentress kept up a rippling monologue, yet stopping now and again, with a little air of exaggerated attentiveness, when Mrs. Bedford spoke. Without preliminaries, they began to talk of books, never mentioning those Fentress had written. Both had recently read a French novel that was the talk of the day, and both adored it. Miriam declared that it had ruined all her old favorites for her, and Fentress announced that it had made his own work seem so impossible that he was in despair.

They made their way toward a prim flower garden, gay now with tall iris and early pansies, and sat down on a bench placed under a clump of maple trees. The peafowls were fenced away from this garden securely, but they strutted up and down their own domain and peered longingly through their wire netting.

Fentress admired them hastily, gave a less perfunctory word of praise to the garden, insisted upon giving Margaret the shadiest end of the bench, then went on talking to Miriam. He did most of the talking, but he never harangued. He showed that he was the better read, and the deeper thinker; but he also showed that he valued an original viewpoint and that he accepted Miriam's ideas as worth considering. Occasionally he asked her outright for her attitude toward a certain question, agreeing quietly or opposing her with a flattering degree of animation.

The hour for luncheon came on, and Fentress rose to go, without once having mentioned Buena Vista. The thought came to him as he snapped the case of his watch together, apparently,

and he looked from one to the other of the women, smiling boyishly.

"Now—you see what you've made me do! You've cheated me out of Buena Vista! But you'll let me come again? You'll have to, won't you?"

In spite of the enthusiasm with which he had talked with Miriam, she felt something impersonal in his manner as they strolled back slowly toward the house, and the thought of it nettled her. She felt that he would have talked just as eagerly with Margaret if the girl had been capable of answering him, and she was vaguely dissatisfied. She had a sense of incompleteness, and, as a result of this slight resentment, she asked him to stay to luncheon. The invitation came not by way of showing that she enjoyed his company and wished to have him longer, but to show that she considered him a casual guest who had not yet accomplished the object of his call.

"Then stay and have lunch with us," she suggested, in a matter-of-fact tone. "My talk *has* rambled."

At the door they met Paul driving up, and he cordially insisted upon Fentress' staying.

"I'll have the afternoon off, and I can tone down some of the colorful tales these ladies have been giving you of Buena Vista," he said, delivering the car over to the negro servant and waving the trio imperiously into the house. "Come, come! If you're half as hungry as I am, you won't think of going back to town now."

Fentress stayed, he and Paul talking easily together while Miriam went to give some directions to the servants. During the meal, however, Paul was called to the telephone for a long-distance message; and he returned to the table with the complaint that he must leave the party in time to meet the two-fifteen train. He was sorry, but it couldn't be helped, and he hoped Fen-

tress would come to see them again soon.

He went, and Margaret quietly vanished a little later. Victor Fentress and Mrs. Bedford had begun talking again in their own language, and the girl was slightly sleepy. Fentress stayed all the afternoon, smoking on the porch or strolling around the grounds with his hostess. He declared that he wished to get back to town only in time to dress for a dinner engagement, and Miriam had no trouble in convincing him that her afternoon was cheerfully given. They were enjoying each other too thoroughly for a doubt of sincerity to linger in the mind of either.

They talked a little about Buena Vista and a little about Mrs. St. John, but most of the time was given over to a sort of intellectual carousal, if such a term may be employed for the process by which two alert minds get acquainted with each other. The morning had convinced them that in the realm of literature they had mutual loves; in the afternoon, they went through the same process in talking about music, equal suffrage, politics at home and abroad. They touched at every corner of that mystic world that must be traversed by those who wish to leave the cold, common ground of casual acquaintance and enter the land of friendship. And it must be acknowledged that, by the time Fentress took his unwilling leave, Miriam had forgotten about saving him from the clutches of a harpy!

The sunset was lighting up the cedars in the avenue with a reddish glow, and the tang of warm, fresh earth was in the air. He stood before her, hat in hand, and his black hair shone with purplish lights. They had begun to talk in monosyllables, full sentences and rounded expressions having grown unnecessary by this time. Miriam held out her hand; and he was very deliberate in releasing it again.

"Good-by. I'm glad you let me stay."

She looked at him standing on a lower step. His face was fairly aglow with vigor and well-being. She thought of Apollo, Mercury, Jupiter himself, in quick succession; then corrected herself and substituted Phœbus. *Phœbus!*

"You'll come again?" she asked, lowering her voice as if other people had been near, although they were well out of earshot of even the servants.

"Yes."

"Soon?"

"Yes."

He hesitated, not doubtfully, but very thoughtfully.

"Whenever you'll let me," he amended, turning away as if the recollection of his dinner engagement were haunting him. "Heavens, I'm due at your mother's house in half an hour! Good-by. You've given me a perfect day."

CHAPTER IV.

The "friend-of-the-family" rôle was so easy that Miriam felt conscience-smitten as she saw Victor Fentress fall into it. Alice St. John encouraged it delightedly as she saw it hovering on the horizon; Paul was kindly tolerant; and Margaret was indispensable—as a mascot. Other women began to leave Fentress alone, for it became known that he was devoting himself absolutely to Mrs. St. John and the Bedfords.

The family party eternally dined together; they went on week-end motor trips to the near-by springs; they lunched with Fentress at his bachelor apartment in the city; often they spent long evenings out on the Bedfords' lawn, telling foolish tales, or sometimes Fentress strummed a guitar while Mrs. St. John sang.

Spring was on, riotously, and even Paul admitted that the dalliance was doing him good. Various young men

were invited out to join the revels for Margaret's entertainment—for Fentress was always Mrs. St. John's exclusive property—but no other women were included.

If Alice secretly wondered over her daughter's change of heart, she never allowed her perplexity to interfere with her enjoyment. As a matter of fact, few things in life were more readily understood by that lady than changes of heart—she had experienced so many herself. She simply concluded that Miriam "had come to her senses," that is, had recognized Fentress' imperial claims; and since the Bedfords were infinitely more secure socially than she, their patronage was to be accepted thankfully. Besides, the hours they began spending together were genuine "good times," and Alice St. John lived entirely for such occasions. She didn't thirst for big, dramatic moments, as Miriam did. Pretty clothes, good food, cheerful evenings with the man she loved best at the moment—such things as these formed her heart's best wish. She was never in the least selfish with her beloved, either. So long as he was in her sight, other women were welcome to look at him. She lent him willingly to Margaret for a dance, although it was evident that the girl had conceived a vague and humble infatuation, or to Miriam for a moonlight stroll down to the pigeon yard for some forgotten duty to the poor birds. But he must always be returned to his owner promptly and in good order.

The mystery of how he could endure the situation didn't unfold in the least during this period, and Miriam had to admit to herself that just here, perhaps, lay half the allurements. He kept her eternally speculating as to whether it was his chivalry or his greed that kept him in his position, never giving her the least clew as to his real feeling toward the elderly woman who adored him. He laughed at Alice a good deal,

just as Paul did—and she laughed back good-naturedly—but he was mathematically precise in his attentions to her. To Margaret he was deferential in an exaggerated, half-mocking way which showed that he considered her a child—sometimes even calling her “Margaret.” To Paul he was frankly friendly.

Thus Miriam, the restless, was thoroughly perplexed; and being perplexed, she was alert; and being alert, she was happy. There was a zest now in waking up every morning; there was a zest in dressing, in going to town, in staying at home; there was a zest in drawing her breath. Her household tasks had suddenly become the diversions of Arcadia, because he was just about to come—or had just left. He had his own ash tray on the Jacobean table by this time—and she had learned to make his favorite dessert. All the time, however, there had not been the flicker of an eyelid toward anything unlawful—no handclaps, no whispers, never even a compliment. The two would wade through fire and water to get together—then chatter industriously about needles and pins!

Late in May, Fentress went down to New Orleans, for no especial reason. He announced that he wished to see the city and hoped to get something to write about; and, to hide her hurt vanity over his desertion, Miriam helped him zealously with his plans. She knew the city by heart; so she wrote directions, scribbled over the margins of a guidebook, sounded him thoroughly as to his taste in antique shops, and bade him good-by with a businesslike suggestion that he spend several weeks in Pass Christian on his way back.

After he was gone, however, the dreariness that abruptly settled down over her life began to make her take stock of herself seriously. Up to this time, the spring had been like a beau-

tiful pageant, and she had been too busy watching it to stop and think.

What did she want? Well, first of all, she was sure that she did not want her placid home life disturbed. She adored Paul, and any idea of upsetting him was absurd. Still, Fentress had opened up a vista before her restless eyes, and she had started headlong forward on its stretch. She and Fentress had, from the first hour of friendship, begun to speak a language of their own, but, delightful as this language was, she was fretting for more vivid accents. She did not wish to have a vulgar “affair” with him—that was too much like her mother—but she had visions of one mad moment when he would be at her feet. There would be a burning question on his lips, and she would be gifted with a strange and beautiful eloquence in answering him. They would form a noble compact, and each would carry through life a sacred and unsuspected scar.

It was a beautiful scheme, calling for a feeling on his part as lofty and unselfish as her own. She believed that he was keenly interested in her, but was silent because of the very depths he had reached. It is true, she had more than once observed a lying-in-wait attitude in him, a readiness to meet her more than halfway, an assurance that if she proposed to him, she would be immediately accepted, but she put this also down to chivalry. He was proud, and would offer himself slavishly to no woman.

It was a little surprising, therefore, when she began to get an unwarranted number of letters from him during his New Orleans trip. He sent cards to Paul and Margaret, but to her he wrote descriptions. They were long and eloquent, and she treasured them up greedily, with a feeling that he was offering her something too precious to sell. Once in a while, he wrote: “*You* will understand what I felt,” or, “This

would not have been lost on *you*," and she felt that it meant more from him than a passionate declaration of love would have meant from another man.

It was with the coming of these letters that Miriam began to realize that she must run away from Fentress. She knew that she ought not to see him again, and, acting impulsively, she planned to go home with Margaret before Fentress could get back from his journey. It was a high impulse, requiring self-denial so strong that she was intoxicated with it; but it also held a tinge of revenge. She gloated over the thought of his disappointment when he came back and found her gone. Paul was leaving immediately on a business trip to the Eastern markets—a detestable pilgrimage that she refused absolutely to make—and so it would come about that when Fentress returned to Manchester, he would find Arcadia closed. He and Alice St. John would be thrown entirely upon each other! Miriam tingled with anticipation.

Paul Bedford left for New York late one night, and it had been planned that Miriam should take the next day to put the house in order for their absence, she and Margaret going down to Buena Vista early the following morning. Paul would be away ten days or thereabouts, and on his return would run down to the country for a short visit. He and Miriam could then decide definitely upon later summer plans, for she was already becoming pale and languid with the early heat. He understood perfectly her detestation for Manchester in the summer, and fell in readily with her arrangements to remain in Buena Vista until they departed later for the mountains or the coast.

Miriam spent the forenoon after her husband's departure in directing the placing of linen covers over the furniture, the packing away of winter clothing, and the securing of out-of-the-way

windows and doors. She was a careful housekeeper and she did her work well. But at luncheon Margaret declared that she could oversee the remainder of the work and that Miriam, who had overtaxed herself already with the musty, indoor tasks, ought to get out for the afternoon. There was still a little shopping to be done, and Miriam had not bidden her mother good-by. Margaret was sure that she could do everything necessary at the house.

Acting upon the suggestion as much to get away from Margaret's anxious, sympathetic eyes as for any other reason, Miriam made the journey into the city early in the afternoon. Her dressmaker was to send some gowns down to Buena Vista later, and she called at the shop for a final word in regard to them. But upon coming out into the street again, she found that the heat, which had been gradually increasing all day, had grown stultifying, and she decided to let the other errands she had in mind go undone. Nothing mattered much, anyway.

Driving directly to Mrs. St. John's after coming to this decision, she resolved to have the farewell very brief, then go home and try to sleep until train time in the morning. Her head felt heavy, and her breath came with difficulty. A storm was evidently brewing, and the air was as hot as a blanket.

She rang at her mother's door, and the servant who admitted her gave a regretful negative in answer to her languid question.

"Mrs. St. John is out just now, Mrs. Bedford, but——"

"Then tell her, please, that I'll telephone this evening. I am going out home at once."

The man bowed respectfully, but made an effort to finish his sentence.

"Mrs. St. John is out just now, but

will be back directly. Mr. Fentress is waiting for her, and——"

Miriam turned back abruptly from the vestibule.

"Mr. Fentress!"

"He's waiting in the drawing-room. Will you please wait, too?"

Mechanically she walked into the dusky room, and Fentress, who had already heard her voice, was at the door. He held out both hands, and her own dropped into them, although neither spoke for a moment.

"I didn't know you were in town," she said finally, and he gave a low laugh.

"I didn't know you were in town," he answered. "Paul's fool stenographer told me that you'd both gone to New York——"

She drew her hands away and turned to find a chair.

"Oh, then you called the office?"

"Yes. I got in this morning at an unchristian hour, and I didn't like to call your home so early. But I wanted to inquire about you—at once—so called the office."

She sank down into a big armchair and dropped her shopping bag to the floor.

"I often go to New York with him. The stenographer took it for granted that I had gone," she murmured, her breath coming in a long sigh, as if the comfort of the shaded room and the easy-chair were grateful to her. "But why didn't you write that you were coming?"

He waved the question aside. He was evidently eager to gain information, not to give it.

"Sudden notion," he replied briefly. Then: "But you—you're not going to New York at all?"

"No. Margaret and I are going to Buena Vista in the morning. I'm to stay there until we get away somewhere for the rest of the summer. The hot weather is already making me ill."

He had made no effort to find himself a chair, but stood in front of her, his arms folded across his chest and his eyes bent downward with a queer expression of veiled intensity.

"You're certainly not looking well," he exclaimed suddenly, his voice very low. "What's the matter?"

"The heat. It makes me want to jump into the river."

She turned away her head, but she felt him watching her.

"Cyanide of potassium's nicer," he observed very gravely. "You wouldn't have to get your feet wet."

"But they'd find my body. I'd hate to be buried."

"Leave directions to be cremated."

"Ugh! That would hurt!"

She shivered, and they both laughed.

"Really, what's the matter?" he inquired again.

But before she had had time to answer, they heard Alice St. John's voice, hurried and excited, in the hall. Fentress instantly came closer.

"May I run out to see you this evening?" he demanded, and she gave the barest nod in answer.

The next moment Alice entered—to find one of her callers at the threshold of the drawing-room, both hands outstretched to meet her, and the other resting in the biggest armchair, in an attitude of utter languor.

"Victor—— Ah—*Miriam!*"

It was plain then that Alice had expected only Fentress, but she managed her chagrin cleverly. She kissed her daughter, then stood between her and Fentress, holding a hand of each.

"I didn't know you were here, darling! Clemons only telephoned me a few minutes ago that Victor had come. This morning, when he called to say that he was back, I was already tied up with that miserable tea at the club, so I had to go. But I ordered Clemons to telephone me the minute Mr. Fentress called."

"I didn't know that Mrs. Bedford was in town——"

"I didn't know that Mr. Fentress had returned——"

Their haste in explanation caused Mrs. St. John to pause and eye them closely. Fentress collected himself first, and went on:

"I called Paul's office this morning to inquire about the family, but the fool stenographer told me that Mr. and Mrs. Bedford had both just left for New York."

Alice chuckled, as if the mistake were very amusing.

"And you and I talked such a short while I had no time to tell you anything," she said. "You—big—brown—bear!"

As if nothing could keep her longer from feasting her eyes, she turned and looked at the young man. He had been tanned by the hot sun of the far South and, if anything, was handsomer than before. He wore different clothes, of English cut, and he looked taller and larger.

"Hasn't the trip helped him, Miriam?"

"Immensely."

Mrs. Bedford reached for her shopping bag, and rose to go. Her mother had begun a torrent of questions about New Orleans, the hotels at Pass Christian, and so forth, but she stopped and gave a little cry of surprise.

"What? You're not going?"

Miriam smiled regretfully.

"I must. I'm leaving early in the morning, you know—and there's packing to be done. Good-by. I'll send you a post card—a view of the new mining quarters."

Half playfully she kissed her mother; then held out her hand to the man.

"Good-by, Mr. Fentress. I'm sorry I can't stay and hear about New Orleans. Please write it all out in a book, won't you?"

"Yes, if you'll promise to read it."

They shook hands cordially, and separated.

CHAPTER V.

The rest of the afternoon Miriam felt that she was decidedly on the wrong side of the Rubicon, but the climate of the region agreed with her admirably. Margaret declared that the little outing had taken away all the tired look, and that her pretty aunt was the first woman she had ever seen appear younger and fresher after a shopping trip than before. Miriam got rid of her as much as she could, and spent the twilight hours arranging flowers in vases and thinking. She was really in a state of delirious excitement, for she knew now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the evening would bring disclosures. There would be the Pentecostal miracle she had thirsted for—Fentress would speak to her, and she would answer him. Already their silent compact had been formed when they had united so smoothly in deceiving Alice; they were fellows, comrades—curiously two of a kind. She gloated over his perfect accord with her, but, indeed, that had been his charm all along, she now realized.

With no man in the house, dinner that evening degenerated into a hurried meal snatched between trunk locking and telephoning to the transfer office; and immediately afterward, Margaret announced that she was going to bed early. Miriam let her go, congratulating herself at the time that she had said nothing about having met Fentress in town. At seven o'clock, after the last trunk had been carried off and the last direction given to the servants about locking up, she started out upon the porch for a little breathing spell in the dark. She was astonished, however, when she felt a sharp gust of wind sweeping around the corner of the house and saw that a heavy storm cloud was coming up.

"Mercy! It's going to rain!"

Margaret, at an upper window, heard the exclamation of dismay.

"Yes—but it's already cooler. It'll be a good night to sleep."

"It will give us a better day for our journey to-morrow," Miriam replied, looking up toward the lighted window and waving her hand. "Good night, dearie! Better close your windows. This is a regular gale!"

She walked back into the house, closing the door and going directly upstairs to her own bedroom. The storm was developing rapidly, and she sat down beside the window to watch it. There was an ominous sinking at her heart, for already the coming darkness was tinged by the unearthly green color that foretells a drenching rain. The lightning, too, was not long in making its fierce onset, and the wind grew more violent. Once there was the queer buzzing noise in the telephone that told of its disconnection—the electrical disturbance by this time having reached an alarming point—and Miriam bowed her head lower in misery. After this the rain fell in sheets, pelting sidewise against the windowpanes, and a few minutes later the sharp clatter of hail was heard against the roof.

Miriam, unwillingly, but from a sense of duty, started up and went into Margaret's room. The lights were out, and when she turned them on, she discovered the girl in bed, fast asleep, a big pillow over her head. Margaret always admitted, with a flush of shame, that she could sleep "like a nigger;" and upon this occasion Miriam darkened the room again and stole out, a feeling of envy in her heart—envy for such abounding youth and so easy a conscience.

Back in her own room, she sat down beside the window again and waited. The hail soon changed back to rain, and eight o'clock struck from the big mission clock downstairs in the hall. The

lightning had grown less frequent, but the clouds were not yet beginning to shift visibly, and the rain poured.

Nine o'clock struck, then half past—and Miriam raised her head in sudden despair. She was sitting with her face toward the darkness, chin in hand, watching the rain as if hypnotized, but as she heard the strokes ring out hopelessly, she sprang up and began to undress. The sooner she put away all possibility of seeing him, the sooner her temples would stop throbbing and her breath coming in sickly little gasps!

Hanging away the white dress she was wearing, she loosened her hair and slipped into a pink crêpe negligee. A raincoat, left out because there was no room in the trunks, was hanging in the closet, and she put this on over her delicate pink robe, resolving suddenly to go downstairs and walk up and down the porch. Her blood was on fire, and she felt as if she would never sleep again. The cool air would revive her—and the house was suffocating!

Turning up the collar of the coat about her neck and coiling her hair into a loose knot, she made her way down the staircase and through the silent hall. She opened the door, cautiously at first, but she saw that the wind had not swept the rain against that side of the house and the porch floor was dry. The low Spanish arches looked cool and inviting.

She stepped outside, putting the night latch off and closing the door behind her; but as she walked to the edge of the porch, peering out into the wet night, there was a sound from somewhere out there that caused her to turn quickly and go back into the house.

An automobile was coming! She had heard the engine distinctly, and as she looked through the lace-veiled glass of the door now, she saw the lights flash. The car had turned in at the gates, and the dim shadows of the cedar avenue were now being brilliantly lightened.

The machine drew up at the door, and she switched on the porch light. Victor Fentress sprang up the steps, and without waiting to ring, opened the door, coming in with an air of possession that made him look more than ever like a young god. He stopped short as he saw her.

"Ah—had you given me up?" he demanded, and they both laughed nervously.

"No."

"Oh—you hadn't?"

She glanced down at the garb she was wearing, and drew back.

"Yes—of course I'd given you up! What made you come?"

His eyes held hers for a moment, and there was no longer a mask before his. They were wild and daring—triumphant and full of power.

"I came to tell you—about New Orleans!"

They both laughed shamelessly, Miriam still facing the opened door and holding her eyes to his as if the splendid brutality she found there had magnetized her. They were both in the ecstasy of repression, insolent—waiting—

The man finally turned toward the door, muttering something about the fellow driving the car; but, as Miriam followed him, she saw him stop suddenly and wheel toward her.

"What's that?"

She listened and heard another car coming down the road, close to the wall. In another second it, too, had flashed its lights against the gloom of the cedar trees—and Fentress' chauffeur muttered a complaint as he saw that he must drive out into the rain and make room for the newcomer.

"It couldn't be Bedford—coming back?"

Agitated as she was, Miriam was conscious of a feeling of contempt at the question. In the face of danger, the

man beside her was somewhat less like a god.

"No. Of course it isn't Paul!"

Fentress strained his eyes.

"Then who—"

In another moment they knew, for the car proved to be a limousine; and, as it drew up, Alice St. John stepped out. She was wearing a raincoat, and her face above it looked like that of an old woman. She came up the steps, breathing heavily.

"Miriam!"

Mrs. Bedford inclined her head, with withering hauteur.

"Yes?"

"Come upstairs! I want to talk with you."

Miriam turned toward her other caller.

"If Mr. Fentress will excuse me? He has just come, as you see."

Fentress, too, was haughty. Since he was sure that Paul Bedford was not returning, his imperious look had come back. He bowed to Mrs. Bedford's wishes, but he directed a glance of insolence toward the elder woman. Alice smiled at him superciliously as she led the way up the steps.

CHAPTER VI.

Miriam followed her mother into the room that Alice sometimes occupied on week-end visits, and closed the door.

"Well?" she demanded, and her manner had lost none of its cool dignity. "What does this mean?"

Alice threw off her raincoat, then stood facing her.

"It means that I was not mistaken!" she said, her eyes narrowing and an insane light of suspicion showing through. "I suspected he'd come out here to-night—and I sat in my car and watched his door—all through the storm! Then I followed—for I was determined to save you."

Miriam Bedford felt a curious prick-

ling of the scalp. She was in a rage so consuming that she could not speak for a while. Her hands went to her throat gropingly.

"You save me——"

Mrs. St. John stiffened.

"Certainly I'm going to save you! The whole town's talking about you and Victor Fentress—I heard it while he was away—and I'd meant to tell Paul! I wanted to save you, Miriam!"

Mrs. Bedford's words still came heavily, her voice thick and muffled in her own ears. She dropped her hands suddenly and began unbuttoning her raincoat, for the garment seemed to weigh a thousand pounds.

"You save me! This act to-night is the most disgraceful thing you could do! He has a right to come here! Margaret's here—and I——"

She halted, throwing back the coat and revealing the pink crêpe robe beneath. Mrs. St. John's face lighted quickly with a fiendish triumph.

"Ah-h! He has a right to come here at ten o'clock on a stormy night! You have a right to receive him in this garb! I suppose Margaret had a sleeping powder in her soup to-night?"

The blood drained back from Miriam's face, leaving it ghastly. She looked as if she might keel over and die the next minute, and Alice St. John began to be frightened. She whimpered weakly.

"Miriam—don't look so strange! Stop it, I say! I don't accuse you of anything. I only wanted to save you from slander! Look at me, Miriam!"

But Miriam, with white lips smiling vaguely, crumpled down in a heap on the floor. It was not a dead faint, only a giddiness that soon passed; but as Alice helped her to the bed, she leaned heavily.

"I'm so sick! Help me get this dress off——"

Then, for the first time in her life, the mother busied herself frantically

over her child's comfort. To tell the truth, she was frightened badly; and she began to have a terror of Paul Bedford's accusing words if anything befell Miriam. Without explanations, she felt instinctively that her judgment had been too base; she had, in truth, judged Miriam by her own standards, and she now realized that she had been wrong.

Working in terrified haste, she got Miriam to bed and administered a stimulating draft from the medicine cabinet. She suggested calling a doctor, but Miriam would not permit her to. She filled hot-water bottles and arranged the blankets with care. She felt Miriam's pulse, then busied herself with letting in fresh air through the tightly closed windows. She was all attentiveness, and if Miriam had not been too ill and wretched to do anything but lie there and draw quick, sharp little breaths, she would have laughed heartily at the turn of affairs.

It was all so funny—so exactly like life, she realized, as she lay there shivering. It gives you a temptation, a little strength, a little weakness, a glowing promise—and a distorted fulfillment! She *did* laugh finally—somewhere down in the depths of her. Within the last hour, she had been palpitating with misery because Fentress had not come, then smothering with joy at the sudden sight of him, then cooling crisply with disappointment over him, and now she was burning with shame because she had ever thought of him at all.

Meanwhile, he was tramping about with some impatience downstairs. Miriam could hear his footsteps. She stirred, turning her head listlessly.

"Hadn't you better go down and do something with him?" she asked in a detached way, as if he had been a window washer waiting for orders to begin. "He'll get tired of waiting. Please go! I'm all right."

Alice shook her head. The necessity for bending about had caused her to loosen her tightly belted gown, and she now looked rowdy and disheveled. The rouge had long ago been washed off her face, and her skin was a horrid green.

"No. I'm going to stay with you. If he gets tired waiting, he can go on off. I'm through with him!"

Miriam said no more, and presently the warmth and comfort, after the exhaustion she had endured, caused her to drop into a light doze.

It seemed to her that she had slept a long while, for she was dreaming that Alice St. John was trying to stab her with Fentress' fountain pen, when suddenly she awoke. The clock downstairs was striking twelve; and at its final stroke, she heard the engine of an automobile start. A moment later, a door slammed; then the car door closed viciously, and the machine moved away.

Alice St. John sat like a rock beside the bed all night, although Miriam kept insisting that there was no need for it. She was all right, she reiterated, over and over again. She was only a little dizzy, and she would go to Buena Vista in the morning. She was glad they had not waked Margaret!

She slept by fits and starts, eternally dreaming of making explanations to Paul. But her explanations never explained.

"Don't you know he's gone?" she kept repeating over and over again in these dreams. "Don't you hear the door slam? He's gone, I tell you! The door has slammed—slammed on the Fentress vista!"

CHAPTER VII.

The state of affairs in Buena Vista was well calculated to put Miriam's own troubles out of her mind for a while. Even the next morning, when

she rose from her bed determined to make the trip, the sunshine and feeling of anticipation that the most insignificant journey furnishes to an enthusiastic mind caused her spirits to rebound.

Something horrible had happened to her in the immediate past, she kept realizing, but as much as she could, she declined to dwell upon it. She had endured a "Walpurgis Night," but morning was now come and she had a journey to make. She decided to put off her worst period of worrying until she reached Buena Vista, where the silence and solitude could help her to get the correct viewpoint.

Then, when she and Margaret reached Buena Vista, they found that Alec Bedford was just recovering from a hideous drunk. He was at the station to meet them, but he could not stir from his seat in the rickety carriage, and his shaking hands and swollen eyelids gave their own pathological history. He could talk rationally, but he talked far too much; and poor Margaret's lips closed in straight, tense lines during the drive from the station home.

"It was all my fault," she said sternly to Miriam, as they finally alighted at the gates of the old place and a negro servant ran to help him into the house. "I should have come home with him. I was having too much happiness in Manchester; I knew I'd have to pay!"

Miriam's dark eyes filled with tears, but she said nothing. It seemed utterly sad to her that a girl of twenty could not have "too much happiness" without having to pay. And the expensive "happiness?" She knew that instinctively—looking at Victor Fentress, sitting within sound of his voice! A fury against him swept over her, and during the short walk from the gate to the house, she frantically planned a dozen hideous destinies that

she would like to see meted out to him—including St. Helena and leprosy!

In the sitting room Alec Bedford tottered toward his favorite sofa and sank down upon it. Propping himself upon one elbow, he watched Margaret rather stealthily as she took off her coat and hat; and the cause for this was not far to seek. The girl had entered the room with downcast eyes, but as she walked across to the big old mahogany table to lay aside her wraps, she halted abruptly and looked about her with a dazed expression.

"Why, father! What have you done?"

Alec Bedford tried to straighten himself to a sitting posture as his daughter pointed accusingly toward the table, but the effort was not a success. He laughed weakly, dropping back and placing a larger pillow under his elbow.

"I've brightened up this dull old hole," he explained, pointing with pride to the group of sporting journals and the piece of statuary that replaced the usual decorations of the ancient table. "And the new pictures—and this——"

The new pictures proved to be a series of nude studies that had recently set America tittering, copies of which Alice St. John had kept in an obscure corner of her library; and the object that Alec displayed close at his elbow was a taboret of teakwood, decorated with small ivory tusks and holding an array of smoking paraphernalia. In the center of this litter lay a lovely cigarette case of silver. Alec held it out toward his daughter.

"It's for you, sweetheart! See your monogram here? I want you to smoke and be a good fellow—like Alice St. John."

Margaret stood in her tracks, petrified, but Alec turned to Miriam, chattering away like a talking machine.

"I must tell you, Miriam, that my last visit to you and Paul was the greatest inspiration I've had in many a

long year. And 'twas all because I met your mother! She was a revelation to me—an apotheosis! I have never met a woman who understood a man's nature so well! She and I hit it off splendidly together—and I resolved then and there that I'd take her as my ideal in the future. I want Margaret to become as much like her as possible."

Miriam stared at him for an instant, uncertainly. If he had been thoroughly drunk, he might have felt inclined to humor him, or if he had been sober, she might have reasoned with him; but in his borderland state, she did not know how to answer him. Margaret left the room abruptly, however, and this helped somewhat.

"I think Margaret is all right," she said blankly, "just as she is."

He nodded.

"Yes—but namby-pamby! That's the trouble with all you Southern women—you're either saints or fools. If you've got anything at all in your heads, it's conscientious sawdust. You're a saint—and so is Margaret. But I like a woman to be a good fellow! I tell you, Alice St. John has been the regeneration of me! Since I met her last month, I've had a new viewpoint—I've changed into a new man! She's fired me to a new energy! Hereafter I mean to take all the good life offers me—and consequences be damned!"

His voice was mellow and he pronounced his words exquisitely. St. Cecelia herself could not have taken offense at them—so musical they were. As he spoke to Miriam of her mother, his smile was irresistible; and after a moment's bewilderment, Miriam smiled back at him.

"What have you been doing, Alec?" she asked, turning toward the mirror above the mantelpiece and untying her veil. "I mean, where has the money come from for all this regeneration? Margaret's not going to believe any

more cock-and-bull stories about walnut logs!"

She paused in the process of taking off her hat and swept her hand comprehensively about the old room; and as she did so, the closer scrutiny appalled her. Alec had really bought an amazing number of new things, and they must have cost a considerable sum. There was a pair of rich curtains over a shadowy doorway which she had not noticed at first, and she recognized them now as a copy of some Mrs. St. John owned. There was a large tray of Sheffield silver resting upon a lovely old "pie-crust" table in the corner, and this tray held a new coffee service. The cups were mere thimbles, delicate china set in pierced silver—evidently made for Turkish coffee. There was an Oriental rug, small, but very silky; and Miriam could catch a glimpse of a Chinese screen standing just inside the dining room beyond.

The old house and its furniture were stanchly Colonial, and the note of Eastern decorations that Alec had thrust into it had about the same effect as Arabian dancers would have at a Quaker meeting. Miriam scarcely knew whether to laugh or to cry, although her alert mind had already jumped to plans of helping Margaret pack them all up and send them back to the merchants who had sold them.

"Well, what about it, Alec?"

Her brother-in-law hesitated. His brow grew a trifle sullen.

"I'm not going to let Margaret rule me any longer," he finally announced. "I'm going to live my own life—take the opportunities that come my way. I have a right to make money any way I can, so long as it doesn't interfere with other people and their rights."

Miriam glanced again at the array from the East.

"But unless you've been speculating, you couldn't have made all this money," she said slowly. "There's nobody in

Buena Vista who could lose enough to you to pay for this!"

"I haven't been gambling," he replied, shaking his head. He had a curious patience with the prying of a pretty woman. "And I'm not going to tell you what I have been doing—for that's strictly my affair. You and Paul would never believe I'm a business man, so I'm not going to try to convince you now. Run along, if you don't mind, my dear, and see what Margaret's doing. I hope to God she's not crying."

Miriam gathered up her things and went upstairs in search of Margaret. The girl was in her own pretty bedroom, sitting quietly beside one of the front windows, looking out. Her face was white, and there was a stony, unseeing expression in her eyes. Below the window were the freshly scrubbed planks of the old cedar porch, the green trees in the front yard, the sandy road—then the gaunt house across the way, with the steep hill rising abruptly from its rear. The girl's stare was so unflinching that at first Miriam thought she might be watching something outside. Miriam drew up a chair beside her.

"What are you looking at, Margaret?"

The girl turned her head slowly.

"Nothing. That is, nothing but the old Locke house."

"Then for Heaven's sake turn your chair around! That place gives me the creeps."

Miriam rose and, half laughing, tried to draw the curtains, to shut out the view of the abandoned house, but Margaret caught her by the arm. The girl's face suddenly looked drawn and care-lined.

"Aunt Miriam—perhaps I'd better tell you something—"

The ominous sound of the words caused Miriam a quick spasm of fear.

"Well?"

"Father's making money some way—

not gambling—and it's connected with the old Locke house. I suspected it before he went to Manchester. Then—that Sunday at Mrs. St. John's, when you were telling Mr. Fentress the ghost story——"

"Yes. I remember."

"He looked so queer—father, I mean. He was nervous! I knew then that I was right! Then—to come home and find that he's been on a spree and has spent no telling how much money——"

Miriam held up her hand quickly.

"Perhaps he hasn't paid for all those things downstairs," she interrupted hopefully. "We can send them back."

"He must have paid out something—and we haven't anything to pay with—barely enough to live on. You know that. I tell you he's doing some terrible thing—under the cover of the Locke house."

Miriam collapsed weakly into a chair.

"Have you been over there?" she asked, after a long minute spent in thought.

"No. If I should go in the daytime, somebody might see me, and I'm afraid to go at night. It's silly, of course, but I've been brought up to believe the Locke house the most terrible place on earth at night. It's bred in the bone."

"And in the bones of most other Buena Vista people."

"Yes. That's what makes it so safe."

Miriam fell into another troubled study.

"If Paul were here——" she was beginning, when the girl broke in tentatively.

"I've thought of asking Mr. White to investigate the place," she said. "The sheriff, you know. I thought if I could get father safely locked up here some day—or night—then tell Mr. White that something wrong was going on over there, he might find out—and father would not be thought of in con-

nection with it. But there might be clues that Mr. White could not overlook."

Miriam's face showed perplexity.

"I mean," the girl went on quickly, seeing this, "that Mr. White would do anything in the world for me. I've been helpful to his daughter in making something of herself, and he's very grateful. If there's nothing more than a gambling house being conducted over there, Mr. White could break it up—and father wouldn't be caught there. But if it is—something else——"

She broke off, a hot flush dyeing her face; and Miriam nodded her head. Neither of them could speak the word that was in the minds of both, but presently Margaret went on:

"Nothing but the strongest proof of something wrong could ever have made me suspect him. You see, I've always worshiped him so! It's not like you and Mrs. St. John, who were strangers to each other until a little while ago. When she does things you don't like—you're—you're apart from them, in a way. But father and I are *one*! I *must* find out about this thing, Aunt Miriam!"

Miriam's forehead was drawn until two heavy lines showed above her eyes. At times she was given to thoughts very practical, and just now this mystery aroused all of her energies. It was a godsend, verily, for it would be the thing of greatest importance to tell Paul upon his return, and, compared with it, her "Walpurgis Night" was nothing more than a theatrical episode, with Alice St. John acting the clown.

"Have you ever seen Alec with—with new money?" she finally said, feeling herself flinch over speaking the words as Margaret flinched over hearing them.

"No."

"Or—tools?"

"No. Oh, isn't it horrible to suspect your own father of such a thing?"

Miriam bit her lip.

"Yes—but Alec is immensely clever. He's alert, I mean. And he's studied so much philosophy that he can argue himself into believing anything's right he wants to be right. I shouldn't be surprised if you have hit upon it, Margaret. But we've got to find out."

The girl raised her head, dull misery stamped upon her face.

"How?"

"Well, by going over there, for one thing! Then——" She broke off, and her eyes showed that her thoughts were straying. "Oh, I can understand now why people sometimes shut up their relatives in lunatic asylums!"

Her tone was bitter, and the girl knew instinctively that she was thinking of Alice St. John. A bond of wretchedness was sealed between them.

"I don't leave off loving him—I never could!" she confessed, a sob rising in her throat for the first time. "But—oh, I wish that he would die. Just *die*! It would be such a relief!"

Miriam smiled.

"But people like that don't die."

"No, I know it."

"They live on—and have a better time than any of us."

"Yes."

There was a long silence in the room, but when Mrs. Bedford spoke again, there was determination in her manner. Her bitterness was gone, and she was brisk and zealous—businesslike.

"We'll go over there—you and I together—the very first chance we get," she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

Suspicion can no more be concealed than can smallpox—certainly not in a family circle—and the Bedford household in Buena Vista soon showed an undercurrent of vigilance that suggested Scotland Yard.

The two women hated it, Margaret

really torn to her heart's depths, while Miriam had the fastidious shrinking from it that any sensitive person must feel. But they both had too keen a conviction of impending trouble to lag.

Alec, on the other hand, seemed to be getting a good deal of enjoyment out of their mystification. Lazy and feline as usual, he lay around on sofas and easy-chairs, his long, slim body supine, his eyes showing now and again a pantherlike gleam of precaution. He had had Ed Simpson, his "nigger," rid his bedroom of empty bottles, and Margaret found the heap down in a neglected corner of the orchard—whisky bottles proper, but with no signs of a label or marks on the corks; and he had admitted to Margaret some piecemeal details of his recent illness. Doctor Allen had been somewhat apprehensive of typhoid, the explanation went, but it had turned out to be nothing more than the usual malaria—and he would not have thought of disturbing the happiness of her visit with any word of it. Now and again he threw in an insinuating question about Fentress and the other young men she had met in Manchester.

"What? A four weeks' visit and never a proposal? She's going to be an old maid, Miriam! I always knew it! She's so devilish serious."

But light and heedless as his talk was, he kept it up in a steady stream, not allowing his daughter out of his sight for the first two days. He was too weak to walk about much, but he had a cane couch placed out on the front porch, and he made one pretext after another for keeping the two women beside him. If Margaret pleaded that she must shell the peas for dinner and help Dilsey out, nothing else would suffice but that she should bring the basket and pan out there and sit beside him. When Miriam wished to keep her room, the next morning after her arrival, to write a long letter to

Paul, Alec insisted that he could arrange a desk for her on the porch.

More than this, Ed was given a prolonged task of uprooting all the wild onions from the grass around the front gate of the place, directly in the road in front of the Locke house, and it would have been impossible to pass him undetected. This negro man was supposed to be a sort of major-domo about the home, but he had long ago been transformed into a personal belonging of his employer's. Southern men of Alec Bedford's type cannot get along to this day without their "nigger," and Ed Simpson was a jewel of his kind. He was very nearly white, very strong, and had been given a considerable education at one of the Nashville schools for negroes; but he was lazy and without ambition. If he had not been endowed with a sense of the ridiculous, he would have made an excellent preacher. As it was, he had been with Alec Bedford for the past ten years, an admirable and adoring "Man Friday."

Three days passed, the second so rainy that Ed's enterprise had to be given over for a while, and the third evening came on with a clearing sky and a clean-smelling freshness from the drenched earth. Alec had been chafing palpably during the wet spell, and at the supper table that night, he mentioned that a meeting of the city council would take him into town for an hour or more, if Miriam and Margaret didn't mind.

The two assured him that they would manage, and Margaret saw him off. He swung down the graveled path with more firmness of gait than he had been able to muster up to this time, and the walking stick he carried clicked against the little stones jauntily. Ed, driving the carriage, was waiting at the gate.

When he was out of sight down the road toward the little town, Margaret came into the sitting room and looked inquiringly toward the older woman.

The mask of her ordinary expression which she had worn in her father's presence she had abruptly dropped; and Miriam, too, had become in a moment eager and vibrant. It was as if their conversation of the third day before had been interrupted for only an instant. Miriam closed the magazine she had been reading and rose to her feet.

"Do you suppose he's really gone into town?" she asked.

Margaret nodded her head.

"Oh, yes! He's very exact in his civic and religious duties!" she insisted bitterly, her face paling. "He'll show up at the city-council meeting all right."

"But—do you suppose we could see anything if we should go over there? There's no moon and——"

Margaret walked across the room and opened the door of a big mahogany desk, bending over and searching quickly in the recesses of a pigeon-hole.

"There's a flash light here——"

She looked eagerly, but did not find it; nor did a search through all the other probable places bring it to light.

"Alec must have taken it with him,"

Miriam suggested, and the girl nodded.

"Of course! And that proves that he'll make a visit over there—to the Locke house—before he gets back home to-night."

"All the more reason that we should go! Come on! We'll have to use matches."

But Margaret insisted upon getting a handful of candles as well, suggesting that the cellar or the attic might have to be searched and that, anyway, the light of a candle could be better concealed than that of flickering matches. This took a little time, and settling the possible curiosity of the servants at work in the kitchen took more; so that it was about half an hour after Alec Bedford had left the house that the two women, wearing long, dark coats over their light-colored gowns, closed

the front door quietly behind them and stole down the dark walk.

The air was heavy with the odor of wet honeysuckle, and out in the clearing of the road there was starlight. From a thicket of trees up on the mountainside a whippoorwill called shrilly. They stopped in the middle of the road, peering up and down. Its sandy surface formed a light-colored streak, stretching away in both directions into darkness; and there was no moving thing visible as far as eye could reach.

The gate of the Locke house was open, as it had been for perhaps fifteen years, and its white wooden posts were half concealed by the honeysuckle and passion-flower vines that grew thickly about them. The walk had been paved years ago with flagstones, but these were overgrown with grass and were slippery in places where the heavy shade of the magnolia trees had caused a slimy moss to form. The steps were stone, and two ancient lions crouched at the ends. At the front door, which showed gaunt spaces where small panels of glass had been broken out, they caught the odor of old plaster—the invariable smell of an old and uninhabited house—and as they turned the knob of this door and entered the hall, a hollow echo of the sounds thus made came back to them.

Miriam propped the door open with an old piece of broom handle that Margaret's first flickering match disclosed standing in a corner, then looked around. Dimly she remembered the aspect of the entrance as she had seen it once or twice when she had been a young child. The wall paper was all that was now left, and it was mildewed and hanging from the ceiling in places. The staircase, coming down at one side of the hall, showed loose banisters and a handrail of walnut, covered with dust. The steps were covered with the gritty

waste that had sifted out from the holes in the plaster.

"Shall we—go on?"

Margaret put the question, terror in her eyes; then, as they stood for a moment shivering against each other, a reaction took place, and they both laughed hysterically.

"Of course we're going on! There's not a thing here!"

The echo of that laugh nerved Miriam to walk across the hall and hold out her candle boldly into the opening of the parlor door. There was nothing in there—just the old marble mantelpiece with a common earthen flowerpot on one end, a yellowed newspaper crumpled up on the hearth, a big silk tassel, once splendid, hanging looped over a nail beside one window, and the same odor of dampness and old plaster.

"Nothing! See?"

Mrs. Bedford was regaining her courage by this time, and she put her free hand protectingly out toward Margaret.

"But there's the dining room still—on this side of the house," the girl reminded her, her voice trembling, "and that big upstairs!"

As their every movement had brought an echo ten times its own volume in the way of sound, it was not until they had turned toward the staircase and were crossing the wide hall for the second time that they detected a separate series of sounds going on in the house.

Footsteps—somewhere—were sounding against another bare floor, and as they cowered back against the wall nearest them, a door was opened. Miriam, her heart beating almost to suffocation, remembered that she was supposed to be the braver of the two and that the expedition was of her planning. She caught Margaret by the hand and shook her savagely.

"There's nothing to be afraid of!" she whispered. "It's Alec!"

"No! Oh, don't move!"

But Miriam dropped her hold upon the girl's hand and turned slowly back from the staircase. A small room on the north side of the house had its opening under the steps, and Miriam saw now, by the shaft of light coming from this direction, that it was this door that had been opened.

A man's figure was outlined in the doorway, and beyond, in the center of the room, on a bare wooden table, was an oil lamp. Her own candle blinded her so that she could not distinguish the man's features, but she moved forward, her heart in her throat.

"Alec—for God's sake——"

The man stirred quickly at the sound of her voice, then gave a laugh.

"Oh—Mrs. Bedford! So it's you!"

Behind her there was a little cry from Margaret—and the next instant the hollowness of the echoes was dying away. She rushed forward, holding her candle high.

The man in the doorway was Victor Fentress.

CHAPTER IX.

He stepped aside, as if to let her enter, and she saw that there was a queer, twitching smile upon his lips.

"You—you gave me a turn," he admitted, and he walked back quietly to the table and laid down the pistol he was holding in his hand. "I was expecting a call from Miss Eva Locke, you see!"

The room he had chosen was very small, and its one window was so placed that the light from it shone out against the hill back of the house. The oil lamp gave a steady, brilliant light, and the table held a pile of manuscript, a bottle of ink, and a fountain pen. There was one chair, and after Fentress had placed his pistol cautiously down, he drew this forward for Miriam. His

face was exceedingly pale, but he gave no other signs of agitation.

Miriam stood still for a second, looking at him, then she walked back out into the hall.

"Margaret," she said, her voice husky in its attempt to keep down that dreadful, hollow echo, "go on back home now—will you? I have some things I wish to say to that man."

Margaret clutched her hands.

"To Mr. Fentress?"

"Yes."

"But—Aunt Miriam! I don't want to leave you—— It's so queer——"

Mrs. Bedford shook herself free from the imploring clutch and pointed impatiently out toward the dark front yard.

"If you're afraid he's crazy and will harm me—wait for me out there!" she commanded quickly. "But—don't you see—that I've got to get rid of him? He has no right to be here in Buena Vista! He has no right!"

The girl bowed her head, humbly, and walked out of the front door. Miriam heard her steps against the flagstones; then she turned back to the room where Fentress stood waiting. He had not moved from his place beside the rough table, but his face, as she came back and stood looking at him silently, began to work nervously. He offered her the chair, but she shook her head.

"No! What I have to say to you can be said quickly. I'm not going to stay long. Now, will you tell me, please, what this means?"

The cold scorn in his manner seemed to surprise him at first; then, after a moment of indecision, his own face hardened. Clearly he had expected a different reception, but he was ready to show her that he was not crushed.

"I'm writing a book, for one thing," he answered, pointing with some hauteur to the manuscript on the table. "This haunted house is ideal for quiet."

"When did you come here?"

He drew a full breath, then counted leisurely on his fingers.

"One—two—three days ago, I believe it was," he answered. "I've done so much work that it seems much longer."

"You followed me here on the next train, then?"

"Yes. You see, I had made all my plans that day we met by accident at Mrs. St. John's. The scheme came to me in a twinkling as soon as you told me that you were coming to Buena Vista—that I could get a camping outfit together and occupy this old house! It was good sport! I disguised myself for the journey—then used care to arrive at night."

She was standing very still and erect, but he could see that she managed her voice with difficulty. Her lips were white, and they moved stiffly.

"I suppose you didn't stop to think that this would disgrace me?"

He drew back, trying to force a laugh.

"Disgrace you! Oh, come now!"

"I mean it," she said dully. "If Paul finds out you're here—if Alice St. John should suspect——"

He interrupted her, shrugging his shoulders lightly.

"But Alice St. John isn't going to trouble herself to suspect anything," he said, smiling with airy assurance. "She's washed her hands of me. That's all done for—thanks to your charming eyes!"

She came forward a step.

"If Paul finds out you're here," she repeated heavily, "if Paul finds out you're here——"

"But he's not going to find out anything!" he exclaimed, advancing and catching her hands in his. "Now, my dear Miriam, don't, for God's sake, play heroics! *You're* not the kind of woman who won't flirt unless her husband's there to chaperon her—you're made of braver stuff than that! And we've had

so hard a struggle to get to this point—our understanding has been delayed so long——"

He made no direct effort to take her in his arms, but he drew so close that the slightest forward movement on her part would have placed her there. His face broke into a brilliant smile as he saw her cower back.

"No—don't look so frightened! I'm not going to make the slightest advance! You know that, don't you? I never do! All the action of my love stories must come from the woman—and I do the psychology!"

She stared at him.

"You brute!" she said stammeringly. "You brute! I've a great mind to get that pistol and kill you."

He turned, picking up the pistol and slipping it into his pocket.

"And I've a great mind to take you in my arms and kiss you," he replied. "But that would introduce vulgar struggles and spoil my last chapter. That's the great beauty about this affair of ours—it has the serenity of a masterpiece. Surely you're not going to break the spell?"

There was still a note of appeal in his manner. He spoke to her as if he meant still to give her a chance; but, after a long moment, during which she kept her place, staring at him with a stricken light in her eyes, he drew himself up sharply. He was growing impatient.

"Now, my dear," he said, sitting down upon the edge of the table and indicating by a motion of his hand that she was still welcome to the chair, "if you've changed your mind, you might as well be frank about it. You and I have had the very devil of an affair—unique, in my annals, because you've held my interest with few breaks. You suddenly decided one day that you'd break up my friendship with your wealthy mother—and you succeeded; but, in the meanwhile, you put your—

self in the position of Most Important Woman to me. You've given me material for a book—and it was my own idea to follow you down here to the country, living and writing the final chapter at the same time."

He looked at her tentatively, but she said nothing. Her eyes were fixed upon the manuscript on the table. He saw her look and reached over, gathering up two or three pages.

"Do you care to have me read it to you—this final chapter?" he asked, sorting the pages and leaning forward to get a good light. "A portion of it is pretty—very. Listen: 'He knew all the time that it was the beast in him that swayed her. To her, he was Power; to him, she was Grace. They were complements of each other. They clasped hands and passed together through the gates of friendship into a region as mystic and indefinable as a background of Leonardo's fancy. They crossed bridges together'—that's when we discussed sociological affairs and I called names that made your spine quiver to hear—'they climbed hillsides'—that's when I taught you to read Ellen Key—'they lingered in valleys'—badinage, repartee, that sounded well, but amounted to nothing—'they bowed their heads under arches'—Ah, the two or three great moments when neither of us was posing!"

If the spell of his brutality had been lasting, Miriam Bedford would have been undone now. He dropped the manuscript to his knee, just for a moment, and looked up at her to see the effect. The light of the conqueror in his eyes glorified him. He felt himself a king—physically strong and lithe as a lion, the king of the jungle; mentally, a being enthroned in the minds of men by the cunning and daring of this book he had written.

He watched to see the effect upon her, but he was disappointed, for the spell of his brutality did not work.

Miriam's face was flaming with shame, and she pointed to the manuscript pleadingly.

"Surely you'll not publish that thing about me?" she asked, her lips moving slowly. "You'll not disgrace me?"

"Disgrace you?" He gave a light laugh. "Why, dear girl, this will exalt you! The Manchester women will die of envy. I've made the portrait too accurate for any doubts to arise in their minds—I had to do this while I was in New Orleans, to get the perspective right—and you will be the heroine next winter! I'll have to read you more of it—and you'll fall in love with yourself more thoroughly than you have ever done."

With a smile too rapt to be entirely mocking, he placed the manuscript on the table, and bent over to search through another pile of papers.

"Where is that introduction?" he muttered, running through the loose sheets hurriedly. "It's whimsical as the Dickens—but it's clever—"

He was so absorbed in his search that he failed to watch the woman beside him; and, as she saw him occupied, both hands busy over the papers on the far side of the table, she made a quick dive forward, securing his precious final chapter. She clutched it, but as she was jerking back her hand, he saw her design and darted around to her side.

"You little fool! This is a business matter!"

She sprang backward toward the tiny window, holding the sheaf of papers high above her head. If she could throw them out of the window, they would be scattered—and that would give her time. She was frantic and, as he caught her, just as she was raising her arm high for the effort, she wrestled with him savagely.

"You'll never send this thing off!" she panted, the muscles of her wrists white and straining. "You'll never dis-

grace Paul—the Bedford family—by making such a thing as this public!”

He laughed, first with scorn, then with triumph. He caught her arm and wrested the papers from her hand. Then, with these secure in one hand, he held her back from him for a moment with the other.

“You little devil!” he cried, relaxing his tension somewhat with his victorious laugh. “What do you care about Paul—or your precious Bedford family? Get too savage, my lady, and I’ll telegraph this in to headquarters to-night!”

His words were loud and ringing, and the reverberation they created came back to them after a moment in a weird confusion—and then the sound of other words! A man was at the door of the little room, shouting out something!

Miriam raised her head, peering above Fentress’ shoulder. Ale Bedford stood in the hall, and she saw the gleam of a revolver in his hand. Fentress was facing her, standing with his back toward the door, and he saw the look of terror in her eyes. The next instant she had dropped upon the floor, and, almost simultaneous with this move on her part, there was a flash of fire in the doorway. A report sounded—followed by another that repeated itself in a dozen varying echoes.

Fentress dropped to the floor, crumpling in a heap, and his face blanched horribly. Miriam raised herself to her knees. Their two faces were scarcely three feet apart, and as she drew back, trying to rise, she saw that a little trickle of blood was already staining the floor. She looked toward the hall, holding out her arms.

“Oh—Alec—”

She saw Alec Bedford stagger into the room and, dazed as she was, she could not fail to know that he was drunk. But before he could make his zigzag way across the floor, Margaret was on the spot. The girl threw her

father aside, making straight for Miriam and helping her to her feet.

“You’re not hurt?” she demanded.

“No—but—look!”

“Is he—killed?”

The two women knelt down beside Fentress, and Margaret managed to lift his head slightly. She dropped her ear down against his chest.

“He’s breathing,” she said. “Help me get his shirt off.”

Miriam bent down obediently to do as she was directed, but before she had reached her hands out toward the bleeding arm, she felt herself drawn backward.

“Lemme see, miss!”

Looking up, she saw a roughly clad man bending over her—a man from the mountains, apparently. His stupid face showed little or no concern.

“Why—it ain’t the rev’nue man, nohow!”

There was a disappointed whine in the uncouth voice, and the mountaineer turned toward Alec Bedford with a faint laugh.

“This yere ain’t the rev’nue man, boss!”

Alec struggled to rise from the chair into which Margaret had flung him a moment before, and his hand went to his head. The ruffian’s words appeared to have a sobering effect upon him.

“You’re lying,” he said, tottering across the room to look at the man on the floor. “I heard him tell Miriam he’d telegraph the report in to headquarters to-night! I knew then he’d found the stuff in the cellar!”

He bent over, placing one hand against Margaret’s shoulder, and looked at the pallid face resting on her knee. As he dimly recognized his victim, he began to weep, whimpering and explaining.

“Why, sweetheart, I thought it was the revenue man—come to get your poor old dad for running a blind tiger! I didn’t know it was a friend of ours!”

Great God! What will become of me now? Help me get away from here, Hutchins! Ed! Where's Ed?"

At this wail, the negro man appeared instantly. Alec Bedford held out his hand to him.

"Oh, Ed—thank God you're here! Help me home—that's a good boy—and help me hide away somewhere——"

But the maudlin, terrified pleading was cut short by a command from Margaret.

"Ed—leave father alone and go at once for Doctor Allen! And you—you——" She turned to the rough man at her side. "You're Hutchins, the moonshiner, are you?"

"Yes, miss."

"Well, can you help me carry this man across the road to my house?" she demanded quietly. "He isn't dead, but he's bleeding frightfully—and we've got to do something before Doctor Allen can get here. Here, take his shoulders—this way—— *Oh-h!*"

She broke off with a little cry of agony, for her hand had swept into a perfect fountain of blood.

"This must be the place that's bleeding so!"

Tearing away his shirt sleeve, the girl found the wound and drew the edges together with her fingers. Miriam held out a handkerchief that she had taken from Fentress' pocket, but Margaret shook her head.

"Use that down here—on his arm! There's another place——"

Quickly Miriam twisted it around the arm. It was his right arm, and the little batch of manuscript that he had taken so much pains to wrest from her a short while before was quite ruined now. It was lying just where he had fallen, and it was drenched with blood. Miriam slipped on it slightly, as she made an effort to rise to her feet.

"Oh, if we can just get him over home!" Margaret exclaimed, turning

toward the door. "Hutchins! Where is——"

She looked up, for there was a sound of footsteps in the hall, but it was not Hutchins. The mountaineer had disappeared, and White, the county sheriff, was standing just outside the door, his jaw dropping.

"Miss Margaret!"

The girl gave a cry, startled and afraid.

"Oh—I thought you were that man, Hutchins!" she exclaimed, looking from the sheriff to her father in a distracted way. "Hutchins—the moonshiner, you know!"

The sheriff entered the room, approaching the injured man curiously.

"Did Hutchins shoot this fellow?" he asked, turning to Alec Bedford, who still sat weeping forlornly in the chair beside the table. "We expected to raid this place to-night, for we'd got word that Hutchins was storing his whisky here and selling it—but——"

Alec struggled to his feet, his tears suddenly stopped.

"My God—yes! Hutchins shot him! Hutchins shot him! He thought he was the revenue man—and fired at him in the dark. He told us so! We heard the shot and ran over here. This man is Victor Fentress—a friend of ours."

Incoherent as his words were, they sounded plausible to the sheriff, who now dropped down on one knee beside the bleeding man. He ran his hand quickly over his chest, nodding his head as he felt the steady heartbeat.

"He ain't dead," he announced grimly, as he rose again and turned toward the door. "Have you sent somebody for the doctor, Miss Margaret?"

"Yes. Ed went."

The sheriff glanced toward Alec Bedford questioningly.

"I guess you couldn't help in carrying him?" he asked. "He ought to be put to bed——"

His manner was respectful enough,

but there was an undercurrent of good-natured contempt in his tone as he shot a hurried look at the limp figure. Alec attempted to straighten himself.

"Me? I've been sick, you know——" he began, but the sheriff interrupted him briskly.

"Yes—I know you've been sick. But this man ought to be cared for before he bleeds to death. You ought to get him over to your house—and I can't help to carry him because I've got to go on after Hutchins. I've already let him get away—but seeing so many people in here got me balled up! I heard the shot—and saw Miss Margaret the first thing. I—I lost my head. But I've got to go now!"

Margaret, her fingers still tight against the bleeding wound in Fentress' shoulder, looked up at the officer. There was a wild light of pleading in her eyes.

"Oh, Mr. White—don't leave us here alone!" she begged, a sob tearing her throat. "There are other men with you—I saw their flash lights down by the gate! Let them go and catch Hutchins, and you—you stay here!"

She was not a good liar, even in an extremity like this; and as the grim old officer stopped at the door and turned back to her sorrowfully, she could not meet his eyes. Her own dropped, for she was afraid he would read her secret. Her wish for the moonshiner to escape was so overpowering that she was half afraid she had screamed out what was in her heart:

"Let Hutchins go! Let Hutchins go! For if he is caught, my father will be ruined!"

But Sheriff White was free from suspicion. He rubbed the back of his rough hand across his mouth, his sign of emotion, and shook his head.

"Deputies ain't much good sometimes, without their leader—and they might let Hutchins get by," he said, his words coming jerkily. "Ain't many

things I wouldn't do for you, Miss Margaret—you know that—but this is my job, and I've got to go."

He started out of the door, but Margaret gave one more despairing call.

"Mr. White! This man may be dying! I don't know! Stay here!"

The man shook his head again, his patience well in hand.

"If he dies, Hutchins ain't simply a moonshiner," he answered, the words coming with solemn emphasis. "He's a murderer. I've got to go!"

CHAPTER X.

He went, and the next moment the three people watching beside the injured man heard a sharp call from the front door. It was answered by the rush of feet up the flagstones, and there was the sound of voices in the hall. The sheriff was giving orders, and the men of his posse were keen for the sport of the chase.

"There ain't but one way to go—up the mountain! He's like a squirrel, and he knows every rock and tree in this wilderness! It ain't going to be easy work!"

But, easy or hard, it was exciting—and there was a swift stampede through the hall of the old house. A wide back door opened into a small yard; and there, directly before their eyes, were the dim outlines of Hutchins' fastness—the steep hill rising abruptly. Tree-tops were faintly silhouetted against the starry sky, and the underbrush formed heavy shadows. The territory for miles behind this hill was unsettled and uncleared—red clay land covered with scrubby cedars and pines. Even fishermen who sometimes went into the depths for the fine trout a distant stream yielded had to mark the trees carefully, and now and then nail up a pine board with a hand pointing the way.

It was a needle-in-a-haystack propo-

sition, and Margaret Bedford, crouching beside Fentress, weighed the chances her father had for escape. Hutchins was a notorious outlaw, desperate and cunning; he would be hard to catch. But, once caught, he would be merciless in his implications. She had often heard of Hutchins, the moonshiner. She had carelessly read of his misdeeds, the local newspaper giving colorful accounts of a still captured, a store of liquor found in a cave, or a suspected "blind tiger" located in the town and supposedly furnished with goods by the wildcatter. She had heard of Hutchins, but now she knew him. He and her father were partners in business! Hutchins and Bedford! She saw it all. Hutchins had been the manufacturer; Ed, the negro, the retailer; and Alec Bedford the middleman! He had furnished the brains and the nerve for the enterprise in the old Locke house—perhaps making these nightly visits to protect Ed against the interference of Miss Eva Locke!

She tried to remember what the law was in regard to accomplices of such crimes as this, but she could summon nothing out of her memory. She was certain only that it meant the penitentiary—the crime of making and selling whisky illegally. The penitentiary for the lesser crime—while if Fentress died—

She looked down at him in agony. Her grip against his wound had not relaxed for a quarter of a second, although her thoughts had strayed far from him. Miriam had done her work well with the handkerchief tied over the artery lower down, and now, with her own fingers pinching the big wound, the blood was held back. He was breathing rapidly, and he stirred occasionally as if in pain. His eyes were half closed, but neither of the two women made any effort to see if he were conscious. Miriam was kneeling at one side of him, twisting the hand-

kerchief until her hands were blanched with their effort, but her expression showed no anxiety. Margaret had commanded her to do this thing, and she had obeyed, but it was clear that she felt no concern over Victor Fentress.

After the sheriff left, nothing more was said about trying to move Fentress from where he lay. He was too heavy for the women to manage alone, and Alec Bedford was not to be thought of in the way of lending a hand. He had turned around the chair in which he was sitting so as to rest his arms upon the table; and during the awful interval of waiting, he sat immovable. His hat was lying on the floor beside him, and his rather long, wavy black hair had been swept backward from his brow. His face was raised, chin well up, and there was something ascetic, monkish, in his aspect. He was growing sober by great throbs of anguish, and his suffering showed itself in his picturesque and theatrical attitude.

Finally—nobody ever knew how long the period of suspense really lasted—the doctor came, and Alec stirred from his posture of abstraction. The negro man entered with the doctor, and very soon was making himself busy carrying out orders for a basin of water and some towels. Alec at first showed some inclination to follow around at Ed's heels, but he soon gave up the attempt, collapsing again into the chair and looking on.

"Is he—is he going to die?" he finally demanded, and there was a touch of fretfulness in his question. It irritated him that the two women knelt there like statues and that the doctor got down to his work quickly and silently.

"I don't know—yet."

It was the merest breath of a reply, flung at Alec over the doctor's shoulder, and it only increased the impatience of the man who seemed to be the greatest sufferer in the tragedy.

"But I want to know—I must know! My God—he's—he's a friend of ours and——"

"Then go over to your house and be getting a bed ready," threw in the medical man shortly. "And—say! Can you get a long-distance message through to Manchester for me?"

"Great God—Manchester!"

Alec recoiled. His face whitened, and he looked as if he were being tortured. More than this, he looked agrieved over the hurt—as if the doctor were inflicting the torment by way of a personal thrust.

"Call Albert Allen—my nephew. I've got to have a surgeon. Tell him to catch the eleven-forty-five train."

Alec walked to the door. His eyes shot an appeal toward Margaret, but Margaret was too busy just then, watching the doctor's groping fingers, to notice. She drew a deep breath, and her eyes suddenly filled with hot tears, as she saw him examine the chest casually. The shoulder and arm were the only hurt places.

"He is going to live?" she whispered, and the doctor nodded his head jerkily.

"Perhaps so. You can't tell where this bullet in the shoulder lodged, though."

The answer held only the grudging encouragement of the well-seasoned practitioner, but Margaret raised her face and looked toward the door.

"Mr. Fentress is better, father."

Alec allowed his look of resentment to relax.

"Oh—then it's nothing but a flesh wound!" he said. "I hope so!"

His tone was almost patronizing, and the doctor glanced up curiously.

"Who did it?" he inquired, and Alec lingered in the doorway, nonchalantly.

"Hutchins. He's that scoundrel of a moonshiner, you know."

"And this man——"

"Was camping in the old house be-

cause it was quiet. He was writing a book—as you see."

Alec pointed to the manuscript, and the doctor took in the situation with a nod. Glancing back at his patient's face, he noticed that Fentress had opened his eyes.

"Ah—that's good! Feeling better now?" he asked, and the injured man glanced with bewilderment around him. His eyes rested first on Miriam, and she shrank away; then he looked at Margaret.

"Somebody shot me—wasn't that it?" he asked, his wan lips moving stiffly. "I wasn't hurt much, but I fainted when I saw blood! Blood makes me faint—damn' fool!"

"Yes—but you're better now!" She looked toward the door, where Alec was still standing, detached and uncertain. "Father, make Ed bring a cot, too, will you? Mr. Fentress mustn't lie here any longer."

And, hearing this, Fentress made a feeble motion with his left hand.

"There's a cot upstairs. I was camping—and I can be comfortable up there—if somebody will just help me get up."

He made an effort to rise, but Margaret kept her hold upon his shoulder. The wound had received a hasty dressing, but the girl's hand still supported the injured part.

"We're going to get you to bed over at our house, as soon as we can," she said, her manner quiet and matter of fact. "Hurry, please, father!"

Alec disappeared, and the doctor turned to Miriam to ask her aid in getting some fresh water. She was half sitting, half crouching, apart from the little group, her back against the wall and a bundle of fresh towels thrown across her knee. At the doctor's request for help, she rose and deposited the towels she held upon the table. The manuscript was covered by them, and she saw that when she picked them

up again, she could easily pick up the manuscript with them and the act would not be noticed. She could have laughed aloud at the way Fate was helping her and Alec Bedford out of their separate dilemmas.

Fresh water brought, Doctor Allen knelt down and washed his hands. Miriam stood beside him, handing him a towel when he was ready for it. For just a moment, Fentress and Margaret were left alone. The man's eyes rested upon Miriam for a moment, then strayed to the girl beside him, and there was a mocking gleam in their depths.

"Tell me," he said, his voice dropping and a sarcastic smile curving his lips, "wasn't she the one who shot me? It was so sudden—and she pretended to fall over in a sort of faint—I couldn't see."

Margaret gasped. Her eyes opened queerly.

"Why—why—"

His smile deepened. It was almost humorous.

"You needn't be afraid," he assured her, as he saw her hesitate. "I'll not prosecute. Tell me—was it that haughty saint?"

Margaret shook her head.

"No."

"Then who was it?" His tone was languid and at the same time mocking. "Pray tell me! My curiosity is aroused."

The girl's head bowed above him. There was a look in her face, not reproachful, but seeming to beg him for seriousness.

"We'll talk about that later," she whispered. "The doctor doesn't want you to disturb yourself now. *Please!*"

He made a little nodding movement with his head, an exaggerated attempt at a bow; and at the same time he shrugged his shoulder—the wrong shoulder. He quivered with the sharp pain that shot through him and glanced quickly at the girl to see if she had no-

ticed. She was looking straight at him, and as their eyes met, they both laughed.

"Better not try any airs," she cautioned.

He looked down at his bandaged arm ruefully. "Lord! This is no joke."

"No."

"And, by Jove, I'm getting curious to know how it happened!"

The laughter died out of her face as he looked at her again searchingly; but the negro man entered the room at that moment, staggering under the unwieldy weight of the cot he carried, and Doctor Allen turned around. Margaret stirred from her place to make room for the cot to be slipped under the wounded man, for by this time she was supporting his side and he was sitting partly upright, propped against her shoulder. Her face was turned away from him, but she heard an imperative whisper in her ear.

"Margaret!"

She was drawing herself away from him gradually, delivering over the burden of his weight to Ed and the cot, but she stopped. Bending back to him, she pretended to be taking an extra precaution to guard the hurt shoulder against a jar.

"Yes? What is it?"

"It's *you!*" he answered, the vehemence of his whisper holding a peculiar pathos. "I want to make sure that you'll stand by me. You're the only friend I have!"

She said nothing, but she gave his left hand a reassuring pressure, a grip strong and friendly; and he sank down upon the cot with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XI.

A tragedy that does not secure Death as its protagonist always passes away and leaves its actors feeling a little foolish. "A miraculous escape" is fortunate, but it is not dignified.

At the high tide of excitement the night of the shooting, Miriam telegraphed for Paul to come at once; Margaret dispatched a message for a nurse to come down on the same train with the surgeon from Manchester; Ed, the negro, took French leave of his master; and nobody had the forethought to guard against newspaper reporters.

The immediate result of all this was an excited invasion of the quiet town of Buena Vista and a deal of surmise among the inhabitants. The surgeon and the nurse came on the next train. The news had reached the papers by the morning following the happening, and three reporters were on the spot to get details. Alice St. John followed the reporters breathlessly; and Paul Bedford brought up the rear.

Paul's coming was necessarily a matter of thirty-six hours, and by the time he reached the scene, the situation had grown confused, not to say ridiculous.

The story at this stage was that Hutchins, the moonshiner, had shot Mr. Fentress, the famous novelist, who was wildly in love with Miss Margaret Bedford and who had followed her home to pursue his wooing. Mr. Alec Bedford had objected to the young man's attentions to his daughter and, learning that the lover had intrenched himself in the old Locke house, had started over on the night of the tragedy to enforce his wishes, taking with him his servant, Ed Simpson. The shooting had taken place just as the irate father had reached the old house, and he had been amazed to find that his daughter was there before him, aided and abetted in her intrigue by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Paul Bedford. A wild moment had followed, during which Hutchins had made his escape and the sheriff had made his raid on the old house. Ed, the negro, was said to have been seen on the spot after Hutchins had left, but this could not be proven, and the supposition was that he had been in league

with Hutchins and had followed him to his mountain fastness. The negroes believed that Miss Eva Locke was at the bottom of the whole business, and that she had made away bodily with Ed.

Mr. Alec Bedford was said to have experienced a change of sentiment as he had seen his daughter's lover seriously wounded by the bandit, and to have consented to have Fentress taken to his home. It was rumored that Margaret Bedford, in her extremity, had summoned Mrs. Alice St. John to come and intercede with her father, and that Mrs. St. John had come at once, inasmuch as she had shown a marked interest in the young novelist since the beginning of their acquaintance. It was believed that this rich and good-natured lady would make the path easy for the lovers, and that Mr. Fentress would recover and live happily ever after.

Paul took in a portion of this olla-podrida from the Manchester papers, as he passed through his city, heard some of it on the train to Buena Vista, and gained the rest of it after he arrived.

There was a nine days' wonder over it in the little town, masses and classes alike finding interesting phases. The store of liquor that Hutchins had in the cellar of the old Locke house was seized and publicly destroyed, the event being turned into a Prohibition rally. The chase after Hutchins continued rabidly for two days; then enthusiasm wilted and the deputies returned, to be present at the big libation. Old Sheriff White came in from the hunt, angry and humiliated. He had been particularly keen to catch the scoundrel who had harmed a friend of Miss Margaret Bedford's, but he was greatly consoled upon hearing that the hurt man was not in any critical condition, and he listened to the love story his daughter poured out to him, nodding his head in approval over the turn affairs had taken.

Paul was grave, but not in despair, over the story Miriam told him when he reached his old home.

She met him at the station, wearing a most becoming gown, and allowed his pleasure over seeing her again to have full sway for a time. Then they drove home in a roundabout way through the woods—past two or three spots that had been hallowed long ago to them in their courting days. Here, at these spots, by piecemeal, she told him the story, allowing the horse that drew the light-vehicle to wander along lazily.

She scrupulously avoided any mention of Fentress' actual villainy, the book he had written about her. To tell about it now would do no good. He was "down," and Paul could not take vengeance in any way. Besides, her desire was only to confess—to smooth over and bring about the former placid condition which she had once been foolish enough to call "stagnation."

"I should be a liar and a hypocrite not to acknowledge that Fentress had grown interesting to me," she said stanchly, at one point in her recital. "But the vulgar idea of playing with fire had not once entered my head until Alice St. John rushed in with her low bravado! It was awful, and I can never, *never* forgive her!"

The horse's reins were secured about the whip handle, and Paul's hands held hers in a protecting way. From the first word, his sympathy had been apparent, and as the tale progressed, a hard look of resentment grew on his face.

"She doesn't deserve to be forgiven," he answered grimly. "She's not altogether to be blamed, though. I mean, she can't comprehend a woman like you. She's low and vulgar and sensuous—you are a child."

Miriam flushed.

"Not altogether a child," she denied, her fingers tightening in his grasp. "I'm

not going to deceive you any longer, Paul. I thought it would be lovely to have an affair with Fentress—a pale, silent something to feel exalted over when I overcame it. That's the *truth!*"

His good-looking face showed a smile for just an instant, sad, but at the same time infinitely tender.

"I've said that you are a child," he repeated.

"No! I want to explain, if I can," she went on quickly, as if she must get it all told before her courage forsook her. "I'm like her—my mother—in that I'm nine hundred and ninety-eight per cent ego! I know it! But hers is a feasting ego, while mine is fasting. She's cross if she can't be happy; I'm cross if I can't be miserable. It made me absolutely wretched to fancy myself in love with Victor Fentress, and I indulged this to the point of having a Saturnalia. I didn't stop to think of you, the outside world—or even Fentress. I didn't care what happened to him."

The curve about Paul's lips turned into a sudden hardness.

"And he didn't care what happened to you, apparently! But go on with your story, please! After Alice St. John came out that night and jerked your poor little ostrich head out of the sand—what happened?"

She gave a faint laugh, tremulous and suggestive of close-lying tears.

"I was cured! Oh, heavens, what a cure! I hated her and him both. I hated them together, as a combination that had ruined my pretty picture of myself! I wished then that they would marry and go away to Tibet."

"But, instead of that, he followed you down here! Evidently his picture of the affair wasn't so delicately shaded as yours!"

Miriam got one hand free from Paul's clasp and reached over and clutched the driving whip fiercely.

"That man is a beast—and I have the

most savage desire to stab him!" she cried, swallowing a sudden lump in her throat. "I haven't been near him since that night—that night he was hurt! Alec thinks that there was a hideous affair going on—just what my mother thinks! They both look at me superciliously. And all the time— Listen to me, Paul!"

"Yes, dear—go on."

"All the time Fentress never spoke one word to me, or I to him—that—that you couldn't have heard! You believe this, Paul?"

He looked straight ahead of him, through one of the aisles in the silent pines.

"If I didn't believe it, I'd kill you this minute," he answered very calmly, "and I'd kill him as soon as I could get home. But go on, dear. Don't waste time. I want to hear the rest of it."

However, it was several minutes before Miriam went on. She was too acute not to realize that if Alice St. John had not come in, that stormy night, "with her low bravado," there might have been a different tale to tell. Sickening as the thought was, her mother *had* saved her—from a piece of folly—perhaps worse; and the knowledge of it certainly did not add to her feeling of kindness toward Mrs. St. John—it only enraged her the more.

"She—she believes the worst of me—and Alec does, too," she finally went on, as Paul's look of suffering seemed to beg her to finish. "I don't see how I can ever pretend friendliness toward either of them again."

"If I can arrange it, you'll not have to," he said. "But—go on, Miriam. We're nearly home."

"His coming down here was proof positive to her. Then, Alec was drunk when he came into the Locke house that night"—she wavered, wondering how much it would be best to tell just here—"and he mistook a manuscript Fentress was working on for a report

to the Federal office at Columbus. That's the reason he shot him. But, later, he seemed suspicious of me——"

Paul's fingers twitched nervously as she hesitated. Then, looking with a sort of holy wonder at her flushed face, he abruptly leaned toward her and put his arms about her.

"*Darling!* Don't tell me any more about that part! I might have to kill one of them! Alec is only a drunken old fool—try to think of it that way! And, Miriam——"

She had begun to sob childishly as she felt his arms about her, but when he spoke her name in his calm, sane, level-headed manner, she checked herself by an effort.

"Yes?"

"Don't you see, dear, that we mustn't spend all our time now thinking of your part in this thing? You've told me all that I need to know about that, but you haven't told me about Alec—this awful mess of his."

She stared at him, a little resentful that all his interest, all his emotion, were not for her. He caught the look, but explained his dilemma patiently.

"I know you've had the devil of a time, darling—but we're up against something pretty stern if this thing gets out about Alec! I've got to do what I can at once to get him out of it—and talking about your trial only makes everything harder. Already, you've made me want to do murder."

The expression of hurt dignity that grew on her face at this caused him, in spite of his wretchedness, to have a little flickering, inward smile. She was a child, a vain, innocent, lovable child, at heart, and he had been a great fool not to realize that sooner or later her self-love would lead her into some folly or other. He would have to devote more time to her in future—keep her amused and entertained.

"Well," she began, after she had managed to swallow her disappointment

over his divided interest, "Alec is getting a good deal of pleasure out of Mr. Fentress' visit in the house. You'd expect this, though, for he manages to extract enjoyment out of most things."

Paul looked amazed.

"Enjoyment?"

She laughed contemptuously.

"Did you expect him to be conscience-stricken—Alec?" she asked. "Well, you're mistaken! Even the day after the shooting, when Margaret and I were holding our breath for fear that any minute might see an officer at the front door, Alec was as—as brazen as Claudius! I mean it literally. He seems to prove that there's a divinity that hedges a master villain. He laughed and chatted with Fentress about the affair, and showed absolutely no concern over Hutchins being pursued."

"I suppose he was drinking a good deal?"

"Oh, of course! But there's an undercurrent of assurance that surpasses anything I've ever seen."

Paul's lips curved.

"Except the assurance of Mrs. St. John."

She nodded forlornly.

"Yes. And, Paul, since she's been down here, you'd really think that Alec is giving a delightful house party," she went on, the hardness in her dark eyes growing intense. "When I heard that she had come, I expected she would be heartbroken over Fentress; but if her heart broke, the wound wasn't long in healing! She spent an hour in Fentress' room the morning she came—When was it? Heavens, how confused everything has been lately! But she came out and has been looking daggers at me ever since. She evidently thinks that the reason they can't patch up their quarrel is because I have turned him against her. All her anger over him is really directed toward me, and——"

Paul interrupted her gently, pressing her hand.

"But Alec," he reminded her, to get her back from the strain of her injured self. "You say that he and Alice are having a visit together?"

"Why, you'd think it a jolly weekend affair!" she exclaimed, her cheeks deepening in color. "My mother brought a bottle of wine for Fentress, a very fine and rare beverage that she got somewhere in France; but she changed her mind about giving it to him, and she and Alec have been enjoying it together. They sit all day long and chat together, or play cards, and sometimes she sings to him. She hasn't been near Fentress but the one time."

A thoughtful shadow came over Paul's face, and he darted his wife a glance of keen inquiry.

"Do you suppose she's transferred her affections to Alec?" he asked.

"Heavens! Who can tell? I know that Alec admires her tremendously. Nothing would surprise me!"

But, a few minutes later, as the two reached the gates of the old house, Miriam was greatly surprised.

Sheriff White was standing on the porch, talking to Margaret, and the girl's face was pale as death. She held out her hands to her uncle, but she turned instinctively toward Miriam for help.

"Ed Simpson has been caught—and he has confessed—all about father shooting Mr. Fentress," she said, her voice catching painfully. "Some negroes worked on him—his superstition—and made him believe that Miss Eva Locke would hoodoo him if he didn't confess."

Miriam dropped down into a chair standing near, a giddiness overcoming her.

"And Alec?"

Margaret shook her head, pointing toward the sitting room.

"No! He doesn't know yet. Mr. White has just come. *Listen!*"

With a look of utter horror, the girl put her hands over her ears and buried her face against her uncle's shoulder, as the sounds of a song came floating out, lightly, but challengingly.

"Ah, love but a day, and the world is changed——"

Alice St. John was singing, her voice delicate and whimsical as a caress. Indeed, it *was* a caress, for the music now and again stopped, the words being spoken stormily or pleadingly—every vibration made to invite and to inspire.

Paul Bedford pushed Margaret gently down into a chair, then turned to the sheriff.

"Well?" he inquired, and the rough old man rubbed his hand rapidly across his mouth.

"You mean what am I going to do?"

"Yes. He's in there, you see—having a pleasant time with a lady guest. What are you going to do with him?"

The sheriff blinked rapidly, looking down at the girl in the chair.

"Ed Simpson—*maybe* was lying about the bootlegging!" he suggested, his words coming in a wheezy gasp. "And as for the shooting——"

"The hurt man is getting well," Paul threw in, and the sheriff nodded hopefully.

"I know it—that's what I'm trying to get at! The negro's tale is maybe a lie—and the shot man ain't much hurt—and if Mr. Bedford would disappear—— My God! It's a shame to disgrace her!"

He was a stern old moralist, and it went hard with him to fail in his duty—but the sight of Margaret's stony face was too much for him. He turned toward the house, shaking his fist savagely in the direction of the lilting music.

"Can you get him away—clean away?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"At once?"

Margaret sprang up from her chair at this and caught the old man's hand in hers.

"Oh, Mr. White—yes!" she cried. "We'll get him away! But what will happen to you? Will other people know—and will it make trouble for you?"

He patted her hand awkwardly; then a wicked twinkle came for an instant to his grim old face.

"Ed Simpson confessed to me—privately," he said, releasing the girl's hand and moving at the same time toward the steps. "It'll come out later—maybe—but right now I'm going to regard the confession from the standpoint of a priest—not a sheriff."

CHAPTER XII.

The proposal that Paul Bedford immediately laid before his brother was received with a smile—accompanied by a quick stare of unbelief.

"What? Me—go to Honduras? Where's the money coming from?"

Alice St. John sprang up from the piano at the sound of her son-in-law's voice and came across the room, giving him a little pecking kiss on the cheek.

"What's the trouble?" she demanded, looking at the two brothers in an interested fashion. "Oh, they've found out about Alec, have they?"

Paul Bedford glanced from his brother's face to that of his wife's mother, studying the two curiously for an instant. Then the feeling of rage and disgust that had first assailed him upon seeing them thus cheerfully absorbed in each other passed away, and a sort of hysterical amusement came over him. He could see their hopeless irresponsibility and smile over it, in spite of his scorn.

"They've found out that Alec is a bootlegger and a would-be murderer,"

he said shortly. "But the sheriff has given Margaret a chance to get him out of the way. For God's sake get a stir on you, Alec! The noon train is not two hours away!"

"But where's the money coming from?" the culprit insisted, looking at his brother reproachfully. "Honduras! Good God!"

"I'm going to give you the money, of course."

Paul's manner was not exactly ungru'ging, and his mother-in-law instantly resented it.

"No, you won't!" she denied, throwing out her chin with a certain little proud motion that must have been very attractive in her young days. "You'd only make him humiliated over it the rest of his days—you cold-blooded, virtuous prig! I'll give him the money, myself!"

Alec wheeled toward her, his hand raised protestingly.

"Alice, I couldn't——"

She caught his hand in hers.

"But you must! I have more than I can ever spend, and——"

He gained possession of her hand by using both his, and as he drew her toward him, there was a light of determination in his face that caused her to hesitate and look at him expectantly.

"I couldn't," he interrupted, "unless you go, too."

"Which is exactly what I'd been hoping you'd suggest," she replied, her rippling laugh accompanying the words. "Oh, my dear—we'll be so happy! I've always wanted to see Central America."

Paul stood as if paralyzed for a moment, his jaw dropping.

"But—but—do you mean to be married first?" he inquired, and Alec drew himself up haughtily at the question.

"Why, you infamous scoundrel!" he pronounced, looking at his brother witheringly. "What do you mean?"

Miriam was at the door, having come

in just as Paul put his amazed question. She came forward precipitately now.

"He means—he means—that you'll have to hurry!" she exclaimed, her breath coming fast. "If you're going to be married and catch that noon train——"

"But we're not!" Mrs. St. John interrupted, a new dignity seeming suddenly to have descended upon her with her rôle of bride-to-be. "We'll get out of this town on that noon train—since your precious sheriff is such a brute as to insist upon it—but we'll be married in Manchester in my own home! I hope you don't think I'm so forgetful of propriety as to be married under the man's roof."

Her daughter recoiled.

"I beg your pardon——"

Alice looked at her narrowly.

"You ought to, Miriam! You ought, indeed, to beg my pardon—not only for this, but for many another thing you've made me suffer since I came back to you. You'll never know my disappointment over your ingratitude, unless you have an ungrateful child of your own!"

"I'm sorry—sorry——" Miriam was beginning, in a halting, perplexed way, when Paul broke in sharply:

"There's certainly not time to be wasted in discussing the past," he said, taking out his watch. "You have exactly one hour and forty minutes to make your train, Alec! I suppose there are some few little matters you'd care about looking after?"

Alec Bedford started toward the door, muttering something about having to tell Margaret, and Mrs. St. John followed him. At the foot of the stairs, she paused and called out to her daughter:

"It hasn't occurred to you that I'd need help in packing, I suppose? You know I didn't bring a maid with me down here!"

Miriam was still standing in the

center of the big sitting room, but she followed her mother reluctantly to her upstairs bedroom. This apartment, like the rest of the house, was stately and severe in its appointments, but it was cluttered now with a dozen evidences of Mrs. St. John's luxurious occupancy. The prospective bride pointed, desperately, to the array. Although she had left home in the stress of terrible excitement, and had intended making her journey an errand of mercy solely, she had brought a steamer trunk well packed with what she termed "necessities."

"Merciful heavens! Can I ever get all this together?"

Miriam closed the door after her and looked about the room. Her head was whirling madly, and she expected any moment to awake and find this wild plan only a dream.

"I'll help you," she volunteered unsteadily, as she started up out of her musing and found her mother looking at her in expectation. "I'll help you—but I ought to go to Margaret first. She'll be feeling pretty sad, you know."

Alice had a gorgeously embroidered lounging robe flung over her arm and was making for the opened trunk, but she stopped suddenly.

"Sad?"

"I should think so."

"But why, pray? I should think she would be feeling very happy and grateful."

Miriam made no answer, but she aroused herself enough to walk across to the tall bureau and begin collecting the toilet articles. Every convenience imaginable for the adornment of face and coiffure was there—jars of cream, boxes of powder, bottles of liquid rouge, tubes of almond paste, even a small alcohol lamp for heating curling tongs. Mrs. Bedford collected these and handed them to her mother, who was bending over the trunk.

"You haven't answered my question,"

Alice finally said, as the silence became uncomfortable. "I certainly see no reason why Margaret should be miserable."

Miriam met the challenging eyes; then her own dropped.

"No? Then there's no use talking about it, is there?"

"But I want to talk about it," Alice persisted, for once showing a touch of ill nature in her usual charming manner. "I shall not have a chance again perhaps—for Alec and I will not likely come back to the States."

"No. I suppose not," her daughter answered.

"Ah! You're not pretending to be sorry?"

"No. The time for pretending is over—isn't it?"

There was nothing suggestive of cruelty in the younger woman's reply—only a dull tone of patience and hopelessness—but Mrs. St. John collapsed against the side of the trunk as she heard it, and tears began to flow down her cheeks.

"Miriam, I want to tell you that you are undoubtedly the coldest-blooded and most unfeeling person I've ever known in my life!" she pronounced jerkily, as her sobs rose to choke back her words. "You are a St. John, through and through! I ought to have known better than to think that I could come back home and spend my old age happily with you—but I came, full of loving hopes! I met you and your husband—and from the first moment I realized my mistake! But I had to stay then, for I was too proud to admit my disappointment. I stayed. Then the promise of romance came again into my life, but even this was destined to be blighted by you. You envied me my good fortune—for it would have been good fortune to have married Victor Fentress at the time I cared so much for him—and set about to destroy it. You succeeded in your

savage plot. That night—that night stands out in my memory——”

Miriam had stood like a statue during the tirade, but as her mother mentioned that horrible night, she took a step forward.

“Please don’t!” she begged, her voice low with anguish. “Don’t you suppose that was the most horrible night of my life, too? I can’t talk about it. I won’t have it mentioned!”

Her mother dried her tears upon the hem of a lacy petticoat lying in the tray of the trunk and raised herself to a kneeling posture.

“I wasn’t going to bear malice, though,” she went on, after a moment spent in collecting herself. “When I heard that Victor had been injured, I came to him at once. I determined to show him that I was a friend all the way through—but your poison was still working. He scorned me—my offers of aid. He said he was through with women.”

Miriam bent over the trunk, handing Alice the things she was getting together.

“Well, that doesn’t matter much, does it, just so you’re not through with men?”

Mrs. St. John stared.

“You mean that for a slur, of course?”

“Indeed no!” her daughter answered, her face flushing. “I meant only that he could not crush you. And I am glad, for I believe that you will be much happier with Alec.”

There was so much sincerity in the denial that the elder lady was mollified. A triumphant light shone for a moment in her eyes.

“There’s small doubt about my being happy,” she returned, as she stirred herself toward a batch of shoes huddled together under the foot of the bed. “I have a happy nature—and as to your insinuations about my not being through with men, I want to say that

no woman has had more romance in her life than I’ve had in mine; and no woman could be more grateful for it. I’m grateful for my past—and infinitely grateful for my future.”

Miriam made no answer, but she busied herself over the task of folding the clothes hanging in the closet. Mrs. St. John finished packing her trunk and dressed herself in a becoming brown coat suit. She adjusted her hat and veil carefully, then had time to go back into the trunk for a tiny bottle of rare perfume before Paul came to the door with the announcement that Alec was waiting. She scented her handkerchief, touched the stopper delicately to her veiled lips and eyebrows, replaced the bottle, and followed her son-in-law down the steps.

At the house door, Alec Bedford awaited her, his face somewhat flushed with excitement. He took her gloved hand, bowing over it with an air of stately grace.

“Beautiful lady!” Miriam heard him whisper; and Alice gave him a brilliant look.

“Flatterer!”

They had reached the porch steps before Mrs. St. John bethought her of a forgotten duty, but she stopped there and turned back to Miriam and Paul with a deprecating laugh.

“Heavens—I’ve forgotten to tell Margaret good-by! Why, where is the child?”

Alec looked around, an impatient, puzzled expression on his face for a moment; then he took Alice’s hand and drew her on.

“I’ve made it all right with her,” he announced easily, “and I’ve told her good-by! She’s a brick—didn’t even whimper once.”

“But—but”—Alice looked scandalized at the suggestion—“I can’t leave without seeing her, can I? What would she think?”

So Miriam, at her mother’s urgent

insistence, scoured the place in a frenzy for Margaret, while Paul stood by, his hand trembling as he held his watch open. Miriam looked everywhere in the house—except, of course, in the invalid's room in the far wing upstairs—and returned with the word that Margaret could not be found.

Alec looked annoyed for an instant as Miriam brought the tidings, but Alice only shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"Pouting, perhaps," she suggested, as she took her place in the carriage and leaned back with a sigh of relief. "Heavens, how I've hurried! But it's fun! It's fun! It reminds me of the old concert trips through France!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Upstairs, in the room where Victor Fentress lay, Margaret had sought refuge. She knew in reason that they would not look for her there. Neither Paul nor Miriam would enter that door; and certainly Mrs. St. John herself would not. The girl had apprehended the demand the elder woman would make, and had slipped quietly upstairs into the far wing, after bidding her father good-bye.

The door of the sick room was partly open, for the morning was warm, and the nurse was sitting beside the window, writing her daily report to the surgeon in Manchester. The room had been selected for Fentress because it was well away from the main part of the house and was very quiet; not a hint of the excitement just passed had reached it. The dressing of the wound had been over some time, and Fentress was comfortably propped in his bed, managing a cigar as best he might with his left hand. He turned his head as he heard the girl's footsteps in the hall outside, and called out a greeting.

"Ah—but you're late this morning!" he complained.

She walked into the room and closed the door carefully behind her.

"Yes, I'm late, but I've been—busy," she explained, crossing the room and sitting down in the chair beside the bed. "How are you? All right?"

"Yes."

"And the arm?"

He frowned.

"Sore as the devil!"

The nurse was copying carefully from her chart, and as the patient began the usual series of complaints, she gathered up her writing paraphernalia and drew her chair out through the door to the porch beyond.

"You don't mind if I go out here, where I can't hear you talk?" she asked with a smile, as she returned to get the chart pamphlet. "I must be very careful with these reports I send Doctor Allen."

Fentress nodded carelessly, and she withdrew, pulling the glass door softly shut after her. A voice from somewhere in the distance downstairs was heard calling Margaret, and Fentress turned fretfully on his pillow.

"There! Now you'll have to go, before you've been here a minute!"

The girl's face turned pale, but she shook her head. The voice below called again, and Fentress looked at her curiously.

"It's Mrs. Bedford, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you answer? Heavens, child—what's the matter?"

As he looked at her closely, he saw now that something was greatly amiss with her. He had not noticed before, but this scrutiny showed that she was sitting tense and rigid in her chair, and that her hands were clasped in her lap, the knuckles white, as if she were enduring pain. He took his cigar from his lips and laid it in a plate on his bedside table, then reached out his left hand to her.

"What is it, Margaret? Tell me."

In the close intimacy that the past few days had enforced between them, the girl had always been the one to show solicitude, consideration, and Fentress had been carelessly greedy of her attentions to him; but this was the first time that he had been called upon to show concern, and he showed it warmly.

"Margaret?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

She said nothing for a moment, her ears straining to catch some sound on the far side of the house. The call for her had not been repeated, and presently there was the echo of a light laugh, vague and distant, and then the sound of wheels. A sharp breath escaped her and her hands relaxed.

"They're gone," she said absently, and Fentress stirred.

"Gone?"

"Father. Father and—Mrs. St. John."

"Margaret—good God! What are you talking about?"

Forgetting his injured side, he started up, then sank back suddenly, quivering with pain. The girl was aroused by this from her look of dazed abstraction, and tears rushed to her eyes as she saw the flicker of agony across his forehead.

"Oh, I ought not to excite you!" she cried, leaning forward toward the bandaged shoulder contritely. "You're not hurt?"

"No. Go on and tell me."

His manner was sharp, but there was a queer narrowing of his dark eyes which showed that he was observing her keenly.

"They're gone to Manchester," she said, sitting back in her chair and dropping her hands again, with a little gesture of utter hopelessness, into her lap. "They'll be married there to-day—then go to Honduras."

He stared.

"It's true," she insisted, shaking her head with a little tremulous smile on her pale lips. "And it's the best thing that could have happened. I know that—but—"

He raised his head.

"Honduras?"

"Honduras—because he was in trouble, you know," she explained simply. "First, he was helping that moonshiner, Hutchins, run a still; that is, he was letting Ed retail the whisky Hutchins brought down from the mountain. And then he shot you——"

"Ah!"

"Thinking that you were the revenue man," she went on heavily. "He swears that he saw you and Aunt Miriam in a controversy over a piece of paper—and your back was toward him——"

"'Controversy' is a polite word," broke in the man, with a mocking smile. "But go on, please."

"He shot you, but when the sheriff came in just afterward, father saw a good chance to lay it on Hutchins, and he did. He's always been very clever."

"Evidently."

"Hutchins got away, and Ed disappeared, too, for a little while, but he came back to-day and confessed everything to the sheriff. The sheriff came to me and offered me the chance to get father away, so Uncle Paul was about to fix everything up for him to go to Honduras when Mrs. St. John offered to marry him at once and go with him. She wanted to give him the benefit of her money."

She was telling the tale in a low, droning tone, and she was startled when Fentress laughed. She stopped and looked at him wonderingly, and as soon as he could, he apologized.

"I'm sorry I laughed—but I swear I couldn't help it," he explained. "You see, my dear, it was only three days ago that she offered to marry me at

once and give *me* the benefit of her money."

Margaret nodded her head, the look of wonder remaining.

"Yes, I know. But she had fallen in love with him in the meanwhile, and he was already in love with her. It's really a very suitable match, and I'm grateful to you for refusing her."

He said nothing for a while, merely lying there against his pillows and watching her rapt face. He was trying to remember what picture it was that showed a young girl with that identical expression in her eyes—a sturdy girl, buoyant with youth and health, but burdened with a heavy mission. There was a most startling look in those eyes, a look which showed that they were seeing things not to be seen by other eyes; and for quite a while he puzzled his brain over the matter. What was the picture? Who was the girl?

"I couldn't marry Alice St. John," he finally said, brushing his hand across his face as if to shut away the problem confronting him. "I thought at first I could. But just about that time Miriam came on the scene and dazzled me. She's really tremendously good looking, you know."

Margaret acquiesced quietly.

"I wasn't at all surprised," she said, and her answer made Fentress stare.

"What? You knew about it?"

"I knew that it was impossible for you two not to fall in love with each other for a while," she returned, still in her subdued, singsong tone. "But I knew, also, that it wouldn't amount to anything. You're both honorable people."

"Oh!"

"It was just a touch of fever," she went on.

Fentress lay still, looking at her. Presently a triumphant light shot into his eyes, and he raised his head.

"By George!" he exclaimed aloud,

motioning for her to come closer to his bed. "Let me see your eyes, Margaret—close!"

The girl leaned forward obediently, and held her face up to him.

"They're like the Joan of Arc's," he pronounced, a look of immense relief growing on his face as he took a long breath and scrutinized her minutely. "Bastien-LaPage painted her. Do you know the picture?"

She shook her head regretfully.

"No."

"But you're exactly like her!" he persisted, his own eyes glowing darkly over his discovery. "Oh, my dear—what a thought! The maiden leaving her spinning wheel to listen to spirits! There's poetry in the very word, 'maiden.' I knew it all along—"

"All along? When?" she demanded, and the amazement in her voice brought back his rambling thoughts. He looked at her and laughed softly.

"I knew it when I was trying to force myself into thinking that Alice St. John had enough money to make up for what she didn't have," he told her, "and I knew it when I was trying to confuse a hectic fancy with love. Those days last month in Manchester—that's what I'm talking about. I had three women before me—bud—bloom—blight—"

He paused, devouring her with his eyes, as if he had seen her for the first time. But she shook her head, with a sad little laugh.

"You scarcely noticed the bud," she reminded him. "You thought it too green."

"Yes. I didn't dream then that it held—Joan."

A silence fell upon them. Then the man made an effort after a better arrangement of his pillows, and Margaret, seeing the awkwardness of his left hand, came closer and helped him. She straightened the pillows, helped him raise himself a little higher, then

hovered over him for a moment. He stretched out his hand toward her, and she took it.

"Margaret!"

"Yes?"

"I've got to say something, dear! You may think I'm a villain—or a fool—but I've got to say it."

"All right."

The boyish readiness of her answer disarmed him for an instant, but he gripped her hand firmly.

"I've been a beast all my life—a selfish, cold-blooded beast," he announced evenly. "I've been a parasite—in a nest of parasites."

"Yes."

"You're the first person I've ever known who was selfless—absolutely altruistic."

"Oh, no," Margaret denied, her hand fluttering in his grip. "I'm just like everybody else."

"You're strong enough to lead an army," he went on, his voice lingering over the words as if in awe. "You're brave enough to face the stake."

"No—no! I'm weak and foolish. Give me my hand, please—for I'm going to cry right now."

He released her and she sat down in her chair, her hands going to her face. He watched her through his long, dark eyes.

"You ought to cry, poor child," he said finally, as she conquered her weakness and looked at him. "Don't you suppose I know what you've endured this morning? I do know—every bit. I've been a selfish scoundrel all my life, but I've never been stupid. I do know, Margaret."

"Do you?" she asked. "Then that helps—lots."

"That's what I want to do," he said quickly. "I want to help you if I can. And I certainly want you to help me. I've just now found out who you are—and I need you."

She said nothing, and after a while

he called her name, his voice very low. She looked up at him, trembling.

"Margaret, you wouldn't think of marrying a man like me, would you?" he asked quietly. "It's a shame for me even to suggest it—but would you?"

"I don't know."

"I'd try to do better in the future," he said. "I'd try to get the upper hand of the beast."

She smiled.

"I've never thought you a beast," she told him, "but I've often thought you very stupid. I knew you'd get over that, though."

"Oh, did you?"

"Yes. There has always seemed so much good in you."

"But it took good to discover it," he said, somewhat dryly, "and that quality was a long time in coming. Half good, like your uncle's wife, couldn't make the discovery."

"No," Margaret's eyes took on their far-away look again for a moment, and she said musingly: "If I marry you, I'll have to break with them."

"Of course! But do you think you'd mind that?"

"No-o."

He opened his eyes quickly at the half-reluctant little monosyllable, then let the lids drop back to their lazy slant. He stretched forth his left hand and Margaret took it in hers. He drew her to the bedside, and she dropped to her knees.

"Kiss me, Joan!"

Their lips met, and the hunger in his pressure held hers eagerly.

"You love me?" he asked, as she drew back after an instant and looked at his face.

"Yes."

"Then—love me."

She kissed him again, slipping one hand under his pillow and raising his head. His glance swept over her, thirsty now after this taste, and he

tried to draw her closer, but she held back.

"Remember your poor bandaged shoulder!"

He laughed.

"Shoulder be hanged!"

"But it might be hurt——"

He slipped his hand about her head, drawing her down firmly, and there was a laughing threat in his eyes.

"Just wait till my other arm gets well!" he whispered.



THE WAVERER

BLOOD brother he of the goat herd Pan,
Signed with the Wild One's sign,
And son of a good and godly man,
Child of a somber line;

Heir of the passions they would not own,
Heir of unsatisfied lust,
Asking for bread from a creed of stone,
Seeking his soul in the dust;

Serving with body the new-old god,
God of our mad desire,
Sinking in spirit beneath a rod
Of flagellating fire;

Yearning to live in the law of Him
Who died upon the Tree,
Dreading to watch the world grow dim,
Joys yet untasted flee;

Drifting and shifting from joy to shame,
Hoping to be forgiven
With the death prayer, "Lord, thou know'st my frame.
May not my soul be shriven?"

Sadly repeating the penitent's cry,
Lips to the altar floor—
Turning deaf ears to his God's reply:
"Go thou and sin no more!"

MARGUERITE MOOERS MARSHALL.



A Deal with ~~~~~ ~~~~~ Shindecot Dan

By Joseph Ernest

Author of "Brindamour," "The Escapades of Jules Lacroix," etc.

ALMIGHTY queer, coming to look back on that evening at the St. Antoine, how I happened to be there at all. Of course, I have consistently represented it to the family as the result of sheer intelligence, business ability, and an industrious pursuit of the main chance—qualities that I now claim to monopolize in the house of Vandersluyt. The Vandersluyts always had too much money to work for more, and confined their indisputable cleverness to holding on to it with a grip that nothing but death could loosen. You had to hand it to them for that.

But I quit fooling myself long ago, and I'm willing to admit in confidence that it was nothing but nigger luck that took me there. I had sold my string of horses and shot the proceeds in playing every lame dog at Havana clear across the board; and it seemed for once that the family council had the right idea when they said I would never learn horses and had better raise squabs.

I'd been back in New York a week, and it seemed that nothing was ever going to happen again except tailors' bills and triumphant monologues from relatives. The Vandersluyts are not great conversationalists, but they have produced some notable lecturers.

What I had left was about three thousand a year that not even my

creditors could touch, and of course you can't count that. So when I put on the old soup-and-fish for an evening in civilization, it seemed quite on the cards that I did it for the last time. I selected the St. Antoine because Delia Crichton-Jones was generally there when she was in town; but I had waded through a lonely dinner to the coffee without catching a glimpse of a face that I knew, and I would have gone to a club with a grouch if it had not been for Shindecot Dan's extraordinary conduct.

He looked a good old scout, the sort that you naturally expect to wear a pair of horns in the buttonhole and take a *memento mori* at eleven o'clock; which I dare say he used to do before his womenfolk started to put the shoes to him. He had two of them along, a woman about his own age, dressed in black, with a gray pompadour and a mouth like a snapping turtle, and on the other side a peach of a girl, the merriest kid you ever saw. She had bunches of sunny Mary Pickford curls, and was obviously tickled to death to be there.

While I was trying to figure out which State contained the Tankville they hailed from, the old gentleman did an astonishing thing. He took a huge glass jug of ice water that a waiter had brought and placed it before him in the middle of the table. He placed

it on its sharp bottom edge at an angle of forty-five, balanced it for a moment, and suddenly took his hand away.

The jug, more than half full of ice water, stayed right where he put it, leaning like the Tower of Pisa, but a sight less securely. It was like a conjuring trick, don't you know. The open lip, tinkling with pieces of ice, tipped dangerously in the direction of the old lady in black.

Why the thing didn't fall and deluge her was more than a fellow could see. The waiter remained there, gaping, and you know how much it takes to disturb a St. Antoine waiter. I saw one spill a tureen of *crème Portugaise* over a prominent actress, once, and the being never batted an eye. It appeared that he was an improver, and waiters, like barbers, have to practice on somebody.

Dan's table was in the middle of the dining hall, and for thirty seconds that jug held the spotlight, perilously balanced, with the ice clinking and floating up to the very edge of it. For the thirty seconds that followed, the spotlight was appropriated by the old lady in black. She shot a few carefully chosen words at the old boy, and the last we saw of her was a black streak in the direction of the door, with a glimpse of shoulder blades above that quivered outraged dignity. The merry kidlet followed, her slim shoulders shaking with laughter under the curls.

As for the jolly old scout, he stayed there frowning at the jug as if he kept it balanced by sheer will power. When I saw that it wasn't going to fall and shoot its contents over the women at the next table, who, to say the least, were unsuitably attired for such an experience, I breathed a whole lot better. The old boy looked up and caught my eye. There was a twinkle in his own bright-blue lamps—an old sport from Sportville! So I gave the waiter my case note in such a manner as to convey the notion that I got such things

from the subtreasury in a moving van, and walked past his table. The old boy kept on twinkling.

"Forgive me, dear old scout," I said, "but you've got me guessing."

Behind him the head waiter and a couple of his strong-arm men were staring at the thing, and you could see them watering at the mouth over the damages they could collect when it fell. But it didn't fall. It stayed there, staggered at forty-five degrees, as if it was filled with anything but water—a kind of a souse carafe, a glass jug on a jag. The effect in the St. Antoine, of all places, was as if some one had emitted an appalling howl and collapsed under the table.

"If it's any interest to you, young man," said the old boy, "I'll show you how it's done."

"Why," I answered, "it seems to be the only way I haven't yet tried of becoming unpopular in my family."

"You don't say? Sit right down there, and I'll rush you a liqueur."

But I told him I was on the wagon. So he lifted the jug and passed it over, and while I poured out a glass, he thrust a hand under the tablecloth and brought out an ordinary timber match. It was perfectly simple when you knew how to do it. The bottom of the jug was propped on the match, but nobody would have guessed it in a hundred years. Try it yourself and see.

The old boy grinned. He had fine white teeth; quite a handsome old sport, don't you know.

"I'm the best-tempered man in the world," he said. "But I've got my limits. And she found them to-night, Amelia did."

I asked him what seemed to be the trouble.

"Society bug," he said. "They've been bitten by the worst kind. Made me give my happy home in Denver to an orphan institution, so I could never hope to live there again, and dragged

me to New York to break in. I've got a big house just off the Avenue, but nothing happens. I don't seem to get any action. I could burn a barrel of greenbacks a week to amuse the crowd, but they don't come around. My sister Amelia—that's the lady you saw—says it's all my fault, because I'm crude and unpolished. That's no news to me. But little Marjorie, my daughter, says nothing, and just eats her poor little heart out with disappointment. That's where it hurts. Lately I've been left alone till I've thought of taming some of the mice that seem to be part of the freehold, like the prisoners in the Middle Ages."

"If it isn't an impertinence," I said, "may I ask where you got all that dough?"

"My name's Daniel Harned," he replied, grinning. "Out West, they call me Shindecot Dan."

I saw a light. 'Most every man in New York, I guess, knows some poor dumb creature with the intelligence of a hen and considerably less sportsmanship who has made a wad playing Shindecot for a rise.

"Copper," said the old boy. "Well, I'm the man that found the mine. That wasn't clever—that was accident. The cleverness lay in sticking to it."

Say, there's no justice in the way this world is run. Here was a poor outsider who stubbed his toe on a rock in the ground, which he would probably not have noticed if his boots hadn't needed repairs, and he's sitting opposite me at the St. Antoine obviously verminous with money. And here was I, Andover and Harvard marked, who had sat up nights for years stewing over handicap books and figuring the chances of the double zero in roulette, and all I'd achieved was to see a few hundred thousand bucks take umbrage and steal away in the silent, inexorable manner of the tented Arabs.

There's something more than bunk

in the stuff those Union Square guys get off about the distribution of wealth. It's all wrong. And I took the liberty of explaining this to Dan.

"What?" he yelled. "You shot nearly half a million in three years? Why, you—you young loafer!"

"Pardon," I answered. "No loafer could do it. Besides, it isn't the record for my family. I've a cousin who beat me to the bed rock by two months and fifteen days."

"Why don't you get out and make a man of yourself? You say you know horses. Now, I've got a big ranch out West——"

I remembered that he didn't know me from one of the bell boys, so I gave him a card before he could get in too deep.

"Vandersluyt?" he said, and his bushy gray eyebrows went up into his wiry hair. "Not one of the——"

"Avoid imitations," I replied. "I'm one of the old original and only genuine, worse luck. What's left of us are few and damnably tight in the wad."

"You seem to have been an exception," he grinned. He had a wide, perfectly straight mouth that would have got him employment any time as a grotesque mail chute.

I explained that I was a sort of throwback to the first of the Vandersluyts, that notably free-handed spender who negotiated the purchase of Manhattan Island from the poor Indians for a whole bottle of fire water, when there was nothing on it that was worth a drink.

"Of course, you couldn't expect a Vandersluyt to do any honest work," said the old boy. "But you'd have made a bang-up manager for that ranch if your name had been Higgins."

Just then I saw Delia Crichton-Jones talking to a mob of friends in the foyer. The sight of her, after all those weeks' absence at Havana, took my breath away, and when it came back, I

had struck one of those inspirations that affect a fellow like champagne, till he feels that he already owns North America and can proceed to allot generous parcels of it to his friends for birthday presents.

"I've a better proposition than that," I said. "Just oblige me—will you?—by giving the once-over to the tall, stately lady in black with the orange bandeau in her hair."

"A grizzly with long fur," said Dan, after taking a long look. "Who is she?"

"Delia Jones," I answered. "To be precise, the Honorable Mrs. Crichton-Jones. She's the lady I'm going to marry."

"Huh! Does she know it?"

"She's got an inkling."

"What's she so honorable about?"

"Oh, she's the daughter of a baron, but she's a dead-game sort at that. Now, supposing I were your confidential secretary or something like that, and I got Delia to take up your kid daughter, we could boost you into the middle of things so quick it would make her curly little head swim. All that is necessary is a little dough. You see, while I had some money, I was always the big noise in my family circle. It's only since I don't have any that they've discovered what a wicked life it is to own race horses and stay in bed till noon."

The old boy's smile was growing wider all the time, and I could see that he was biting.

"A baron's daughter and an original and only genuine Vandersluyt," he said, "sound like expensive luxuries to me. But Amelia gives me no rest, and Marjorie has simply got to have a whirl at society at any cost, if she feels that way. Come down into the buffet and we'll put a figure on it."

About an hour later I scrambled into Delia's coupé just as she was leaving

for home, and she wouldn't believe that I was on the wagon at all till we reached her apartment. Then it began to soak into her feminine intelligence that I had got myself a job.

"I believe it isn't Bronx cocktails, after all," she said. "Now, young Reggie, you can start at the beginning and tell me it all over again."

"You see," I explained, "the old boy's quite possible. He doesn't belong, of course, but he might do. And the kid's a peach! You've only to set your teeth and plug them around a little, and the pretty kid and the old boy's money will do the rest. From the look of Aunt Amelia, she might be a little troublesome, but I guess you could manage her with one hand."

"I don't doubt it," said Delia, with a queer smile. "And what then?"

"Why, then, don't you know, they'll be in society, or think they are there, which is the same thing? And I'll have a fat salary as social secretary—"

"Yes," interrupted Delia, in her slow way, "I apprehended your position at the first explanation. What I don't yet see is just precisely where I become interested."

She meant to say that she got me the first time, but where was her own rake-off? I guess barons' daughters find it indelicate to utter thoughts without clothing them.

"Why, old chap," I said, "that seems to be where we get married, what? Not?"

"Not at all," she said. "I promised that when you were old enough to be possible, and had made a man of yourself, and when you had enough money to keep me in gloves, I'd begin to consider it. That's all I said."

And this was the woman who went mad with joy when I rode that crazy old skate of an Ambergris over the sticks at Belmont Park and won on the wire with a broken collar bone! Didn't it take a man to do that?

"Why," I said, "here's your first chance at the gloves, and you won't help me! Be a sport, Delia."

"It's too risky. I'd have to take responsibility for the creatures, you know."

I slapped my last card face up on the table.

"Maybe old Harned might give you a tip on the market," I said. "He knows copper from the inside."

"Copper?" she repeated, opening her lovely eyes wide.

"Yes, he made his money out of copper mines. They call him Shindcot Dan."

Delia threw her arms round my neck and hugged me tight.

"Young Reginald," she cried, "you're a perfect little life-saver! I'm in the rotten stuff up to my neck! Bring the entire gang round to dinner at the earliest possible moment!"

So I went home feeling as if the sidewalks were laid with swan's-down quilts figured with satin rosebuds. But for the limitations imposed by birth, I should have been an inventor, I thought. A calling in which you get a blinding flash of inspiration one night after supper, and sit back comfortably the rest of your days to draw rich royalties on the patent, had always appealed to me strongly.

But it's always the same when a fellow thinks he's going to connect with some easy money. Almost before he's had time to raise a bit in advance, he finds that there's some string tied to the proposition in the way of work.

Not that I was ever afraid of work, mind you, when there was any real reason for it. I've trained off Lord knows how many pounds of weight in a week; I've ridden the meanest, rawest propositions in all my friends' stables, dogs that couldn't see a stone fence without trying to rub me off against it, that preferred stableboys to oats for lunch; and I can assure you that play-

ing a roulette system all day and half the night is a contract that has the ordinary office job looking like a Connecticut rest cure.

But I never worked like I worked on that job of plugging the Harned family into society. In a month I was a faded wreck, tottering piteously into the library to ask for a vacation.

Old Dan Harned was smoking a cigar before going to bed, and he seemed surprised and a little concerned in his hearty way.

"Why, look at me," I said. "I'm run off my feet by that kid daughter of yours. I have to get up while it's still yesterday to write stuff for the society columns and mail off photographs. She's after me before breakfast to teach her the *corte* and the *demi-lune*. I've no sooner plunged through the correspondence and answered invitations than she must go riding in the park, and then I've got to hustle into a lounge suit and drive the electric around the shops. The kid told the chauffeur he could go and visit his mother or drown himself in the gasoline tank. In the afternoon, it's a morning suit and calls, or flannels and tennis, or tweeds and golf, or any possible combination. By the time Yoshio Namakura gets me into the soup-and-fish, I'm heartily sorry I went on the wagon. But is the kid weary? She is not.

"I'm dancing partner in the evening, and the man that invented dancing on skates ought to try doing it for a living. I can't wish him any worse fate. I haven't had a minute alone with Delia since I started this thing. But that's not the worst. When it comes to being kept in young Marjorie's boudoir to help make a chafing-dish supper and play Simon-says-thumbs-up afterward, I get to a point where I renig. I've been in rapid company now and then, but the Colorado chicken has me shaded."

The old boy looked at me sideways.

"We can't do without you yet, you know," he said. "There's her coming-out dance at the Fitz-Carlton. We'd be lost without you in that mob."

Well, I had to promise that I'd try to last the pace till then, and after that I would take leave to reconsider the whole proposition. I told him that I'd found the reformation racket a bit costly. The old boy cocked one eyebrow at me and said he would have thought it conspicuously economical. But I explained that I'd never been able to stand the sight of breakfast while I had money, and my lunch cost me only fifteen cents, because they never charged anything for the stuffed olive they put in it. But now it looked as if I would have to go on eating three square meals a day for the rest of my life.

"Well, you're certainly delivering the goods," said the old scout. "Perhaps a raise in salary would help you to come to a decision. But tell me one thing—is this Mrs. Crichton-Jones the real honorable article according to guarantee?"

"You can bet the Shindecot mine on it," I answered.

"They tell me she was a dancer," he said, cocking his eyebrow again.

"So she was, but it wasn't till after her husband died. You see, she handed over all her dough when they were married, and after that it was even betting whether she'd be a widow or a pauper first."

"Which was it?"

"Both—he managed an absolute dead heat. So she came over here and danced classical stuff. She would have made a big pile if she hadn't got cold feet."

"How—stage fright?"

"No, pneumonia. When she got well, the Russians had arrived and knocked prices endways. So Delia dug out a suit case full of invitations and started in to work through them. She's

halfway through the E's, and a leader already. You leave it to Delia."

So he did, and between us, Delia and I gave the kidlet one gorgeous send-off. She looked after the women, and I nobbled the young folks and the newspapers. As I said, "Marjorie was a peach, and the Sunday editions featured her photographs and howled for more. There was only one fly in the ointment. Auntie with the snapping-turtle jaw and Delia, after being as thick as thieves for weeks, suddenly disagreed about the color of the supper cards, or some such seismic problem, and on the morning of the dance, I found that auntie had crawled into a hole and pulled it in after her. She and Delia were not on speaking terms any longer. I had a bad half hour trying to patch things up to last over the night."

"I shall tell her that you are very sorry," I said to Delia.

"Yes, do!" she answered, in that velvety way of hers. "Sorry that she's such an infernally impossible, superannuated, flat-footed, stumpy-fingered old tabby cat."

That was a big concession for Delia. I conveyed her regrets to auntie, and the old lady agreed to an armed truce until after the dance.

Well, as I said, it was a riot. When it was all over, the old man beat it to his club, to get the rice powder out of his system, he said. While I was hunting for Delia to take her home, young Marjorie grabbed me.

"You must be simply ravenous, Reggie," she chirped. "I've been so excited all day I've eaten nothing since morning, and everything has been perfectly lovely, and I thank you ever so much, and I'm sure you didn't have time to get a single crumb of supper; but we'll make that all right the minute you can land me home!"

Well, there I was, booked for another chafing-dish party *à deux*. When

we reached the Harned house, Aunt Amelia staggered to bed, a faded and speechless wreck. Personally, I had just strength enough left to carry Marjorie's chafing dish into the library before I curled up and collapsed into a chair, as the novels say, without a moan.

But Marjorie went to work right away in her pretty, pale-blue frock, with her curls shimmering, and her eyes a-sparkle like blue pansies in the morning dew. Makes you wonder, sometimes, how these slim flappers last the pace.

"Poor Reggie," she said, "you've been working real hard, and you're not used to it. But you've done wonders, and I'm going to make you a special complimentary entrée that we haven't tried before. Would you like a glass of champagne?"

I shook my head weakly.

"I don't get off the wagon till it stops," I said. "And as to the work, it was worth while. You wanted to be in the swim, young Madge, and now you're in where it's deep. I wish you joy and all the success that's coming. You won't need me any more, little girl."

I shut my eyes, and she went on stirring something in the dish. I was halfway to dreamland, thinking what a little fairy she looked against the dark paneling of the library, with the dome light shining on her sunny hair, when I heard a clatter. She had dropped the spoon and fork, and when I opened my eyes, she was standing with her back to me and her hands to her face. The poor kid was actually crying.

Of course, I couldn't stand for that; so I woke up with a jerk and took her in my arms and petted her.

"Kid, you've been doing too much yourself," I said. "Why, you're tired to death!"

"I'm not, I'm not!" said Madge. "Only—I've got everything I want, and

now I don't want it. Damn society, anyway! And you needn't make a noise like you were soothing a horse!"

"Well, what on earth do you want?" I asked, bewildered.

"I want—— Oh, how on earth do I know what I want, Reggie, you perfect idiot!"

Well, it didn't take a whole lot of dope on the feminine mind to show me that she was completely unstrung, but I couldn't think of anything to comfort her. I thought vaguely of showing her the inside of my watch, because her poor little curls were shaking on my shoulder, and her slim hand quivered on my arm like a butterfly on a pin. But just then her shoulders quit heaving, and she raised her pansy eyes.

There was a strange, far-away look in them, and her cunning little mouth was all a-tremble, too.

"Reginald, you ineffable boob," she said, "why don't you?"

And before I could think about it, I did. We sat on the big leather couch, and half the time I thought I was fit for a lunatic asylum, and the other half I felt as if a horsewhipping were what I needed. It was hell—but if hell is anything like that, I don't want to be saved.

"And you know you've been dying to do it for weeks," said Madge.

I couldn't deny it. Even the young of the feminine kind seem to be able to dope out the secrets you daren't tell even to yourself when you're all alone in the dark.

"You're not so slow in most things," she went on. "Reggie, if you don't promise to marry me, I shall go to Europe and be a nun!"

"But my dear little precious infant," I protested, "you've known all along that I'm going to marry Delia Crichton-Jones."

"Not if I know it! Besides, she doesn't love you. Any woman could

tell you that at a glance. And you've been head over heels in love with me since the first day. Do you think I'm blind? Reggie, you've always done the wrong things all your life—now, haven't you?"

Sure, there was no use in denying that.

"Well, after to-day," she said, "you're jolly well going to do the right ones. Papa likes you. He said you only needed an earthquake under your feet to be a real man. Well, I'm the earthquake. Now you must promise to see papa to-morrow and resign, and then you can hunt a real job. And then——"

I felt the earth quaking already.

"And then," she finished, "you can leave the rest to me. After all, papa has more money than even you could spend."

Women never give you credit for real ability. But I promised to resign, all right, because it was the only thing to do; and little Madge floated up the broad black staircase to bed like a tireless blue bird.

As for me, I went out into the vestibule in a fit of the blind staggers, and sat on a hard oak chair to wait for the old man. I guessed he would kick me, and I knew that I had deserved it; and I simply dared not think about Delia at all.

When I woke up, it was broad daylight and I was hanging over the chair back with my shirt front all crumpled. Yoshio Namakura, the mysterious Jap I had presented to Shindcot Dan, was shaking me by the elbow.

"You wish cocktail," he said. "I bring upstairs. All same old times!"

I had some difficulty in convincing him that the only thing I wanted on earth was to see the old man.

"He never come home," said Yoshio. "Stop out all night. Auntie got bad head. Everybody come bump, bump off wagon last night!"

He got me a bath with some ice in it and fetched some clothes, and pretty soon I looked more decent than I felt. The more I thought of what I had done, the sicker I became. In the breakfast room I found Madge, as sweet and cool as a strawberry sundae. She ran round the table and put her arm over my shoulder and gave me a whacking kiss. It was heavenly, but it made me feel worse. So I made her take it back.

"Merciful Heaven, what is this?" said an awful voice.

We broke away, and there was auntie glaring in at the door. Yoshio hadn't exaggerated the state of her temper. She was rabid.

"I see now," she said, "through the whole wicked conspiracy! But it shall not succeed—it shall not succeed! Marjorie, your poor father has not dared to show his face. I hear from the servants that he sent secretly this morning for clothes. I cannot allow you to remain here any longer. You will prepare to leave for the West without a moment's delay!"

I went out onto the stoop and did calisthenics till I felt calmer. Then I rang for Yoshio, and as soon as he appeared, I got him by the neck and shoved him up against the wainscoting in the hall.

"You infernal scoundrel!" I said. "You've known all the time where Mr. Harned is!"

He flimflammed in his Oriental way.

"How hell damn can know," he demanded, "when not have seen?"

"Tell me where you sent his clothes," I yelled, "or I'll twist your yellow block off!"

He gave in, for I was mad enough to do just that. Two minutes later, I was scattering the traffic police on the way to the St. Antoine Hotel. I knew the suite the old boy usually hired there, and I hurried upstairs and knocked on the door. There was a sudden scrambling noise inside.

"It's me—Vandersluyt!" I yelled. "I must see Mr. Harned at once!"

A voice came from the other side of the door. It was the old boy himself.

"Calm yourself, young man," he said urgently. "You really must control yourself. I won't open this door until you promise to be reasonable."

"I'm calmer than you are," I retorted. "Be a good fellow and open the door."

So he did, but when I got inside, he was intrenched behind the table, watching me warily.

"Really you must be reasonable," he kept saying, as if he had gone batty.

"Things are in an awful mess," I said. "You'll hear all you want to know from Aunt Amelia when you get home. As for me, of course I can't remain in your employment a minute longer. But I give you my word of honor it wasn't really my fault. It just happened. I never dreamed——"

"Of course you didn't," said Dan soothingly. "I'll write you a check for the full six months, and you can clear out for a bit. You'll soon forget it all. Really, it never was very serious, you know, on either side."

He pulled out a check book and started to write on the spot.

"Serious?" I yelled. "Why it's absolutely cataclysmal! Do you think I would start in to look for real work if it wasn't serious?"

"It's too late, you know," said the old boy, cocking one eyebrow at me. "Delia and I were married an hour ago. She is now Mrs. Harned!"

I stared at him for a full minute. Then I shied my new plush hat out of the open window.

"We leave for Saratoga this afternoon," said Dan, mopping his brow.

I saw it all in a flash—the reason for auntie's rabies, the real cause of her quarrel with Delia over the menus, the fear that had kept old Harned away from home. I grabbed the old boy's hand and pretty near shook it off.

"I wish you joy," I said, "with all my heart! And now you've just got time to write a cable letter appointing me manager of that ranch, so I can get out of New York to-morrow. I'll ring for a blank, and we'll call it a deal."

"By all means," he replied, staring. "I must say you take a very reasonable view of it—most reasonable. But what's your hurry?"

"You can ask Aunt Amelia," I said, as I rang the bell.



WHY?

HAND, why do you seek her hand, warm and clinging?

Eyes, why do you meet her eyes, flee, and then return?

Heart, why do you seek her heart, singing, singing?

Lips, why do you yearn for hers? Moth, why do you burn?

CHARLTON LAWRENCE EDHOLM.

ward to a bright restaurant where good food was a specialty, and spent the dollar he had just borrowed from a friend; for he argued wisely that here was a problem to be handled with one's wits about one, and only virtuals could bring him to that necessary state. Besides, there would be a reward, and, like other men of his profession, he not infrequently spent the money that only prospects replaced. For Kirby was a poet.

While the soup was coming, he took out the ring. He put it away when he saw the waiter coming. But the waiter was a pudgy man with puffy, absent eyes, and between the soup and the steak, Kirby made bold to use some leisure in examining his find. The stone was not very large, but it was exceptionally fine, and he guessed its value as two hundred and fifty. He managed to look at it frequently all through his meal, and no one noticed him. He was just an ordinarily nice-looking, rather pale young man, who seemed very hungry.

For the first time in a week, he gave a tip—fifteen cents it was, and it cleaned him out, but the waiter accepted it with great self-possession—and then he left the restaurant and made straight for his lodging. And, having arrived, he locked the door, and for the first time, and under a dim gas jet in a little unheated place of bleakness that was called a "front exposure"—though there are thousands of them, which no one ever does expose—he had his way with the sparkling thing, and scrutinized it and admired it till, in his excited imagination, it had attained the size of a radish and had the light-projecting powers of a searchlight on an Albany night boat.

Yes, a fine stone, and mounted well up on its platinum, as if to proclaim its beauty. Kirby had never cared much for diamonds, but the deepness and splendor of this thrilled him. He

would look at it till it blurred and lost its identity, as a word by repetition. Then, like the word, its whole significance would flash back again. Even when he retired, he could not go to sleep, wondering if it were safe.

But at last he slept. And he dreamed a dream.

The diamond had become a woman—ah, as only in dreams women can be beautiful! She was young, but not a girl, and virtue was a conjectural quality with her. And she told Kirby a lot of things he was vain enough—in his sleep—to believe. She told him that she was in love with him, that she had run away from her last lover to find him, having heard of his beautiful poems; and she elaborated many adventures she was supposed to have met with in her search for him. And at last she had seen him coming down Broadway, dreaming of the windows that were like jewels, and she had flung herself at his feet in the mud to attract his poetically elusive attention. Now he had her; she was his, body and soul; and all she wanted was to live with him and laugh for him and sing and dance and talk for him. Indeed, she fell into rhythm hereabouts, convincing him of her power to inspire him metrically.

And when he asked her what her other lover would think of him if he didn't send her back, she said that if he sent her back, she would kill herself, for now she could live for no one else. She belonged to him alone; she had found her way to him; she was his forever and ever. Fate meant it to be so, and so it was so.

But Kirby said there was something about the idea he didn't just like. It was a sort of stealing, because the other lover must love her very much, she was so beautiful and so bewildering.

But she said that her other lover had plenty of other mistresses as beautiful as she—more so, because she had

grown to dislike him so that she was already losing her looks; it was only since she had found Kirby that she had blossomed out again into something like her own self—and, becoming very seductive, she overcame his silly scruples. And so they walked with their arms about each other into a glorious garden and strolled down winding paths between beds of flowers whose petals were sonnets, where fountains played elusive rhymes and birds sang in meter. And they went into a beautiful bower built of blank verse in an eighth edition, with Kirby's portrait for a frontispiece. And a page brought them a banquet and set it down and said:

"He who eats may write."

And Kirby ate, and wrote, and the beautiful woman numbered the pages as he wrote, numbering each with an intoxicating kiss.

When in the morning Kirby awoke, the thought uppermost was not the ring, but the fact that he hadn't a penny, literally a penny, with which to buy a paper to find out who had lost the ring.

Going without breakfast did not matter. He was used to nutritional lapses. He went to the nearest square, and though he had never yet acquired cast-off papers, at last he forestalled three regular bums and got the news sheet he thought the likeliest. And, sure enough, in the "Lost" column he found the ad.

Lost—on Broadway, between Twenty-seventh and Twenty-fourth Streets, a solitaire diamond ring. Return to J. W., No. — Waverley Place. \$25 reward.

"Twenty-five bucks," mused Kirby. "That would set me up if I didn't owe back rent." He took out the ring. "Well, girlie, you've done your best for me. I'll say that." He wondered why he called it "girlie." Then he remembered his dream.

No. — Waverley Place was not far. In five minutes he could restore the gem to its owner. But it was still very

early in the morning. J. W. might not be up. For half an hour he could play at owning the radiant thing. Waverley Place was mostly an artistic street, and No. — would be a set of clean brick houses with studio windows and trailing flower boxes.

All at once, he wondered whether J. W. were a man or a woman. The ring was rather large; it could be worn by a man, or by a woman with big hands. He knew three or four women who could have worn it. Anyhow, both the ring and the reward meant opulence—the opulence of the owner. Well, the owner could spare the bauble another half hour, and it gave Kirby an illusion of riches to have it in his pocket. He strolled around the asphalt paths of the paper-littered square, among the slumbering bums and the fighting sparrows, and around by the draggled fountain in the center, shut off for the winter and become a refuse bin.

He owed fifteen dollars on his room. That left ten dollars out of the twenty-five. Ten. Not much. Now, yesterday ten dollars to call his own would have seemed a regular set-up to Kirby, but now, as a fragment or fringe of all the wealth actually in his pocket, it was a despicable pittance. Not that he minded the starving, but the starving interfered so damnably with his poetry.

It was all very well to say that inspiration came out of poverty and struggle. So it did; so it does; so it ought. But what does Stevenson say about that aftermath of inspiration? "On the approach to execution, all is changed. The artist must now step down, don his working clothes, and become the artisan . . . the moment in which he begins to execute is one of extreme perplexity and strain." And for that task, to be underclad and unfed—to approach in this manner his poem, "that incommunicable product of the human mind," the "airy conception, his delicate Ariel!" No. A poem is a

sort of child to whom, having begotten him, the parent owes subsistence as a duty, a social duty, so that the child shall grow up to be a healthy, useful, helpful citizen.

You perceive that Kirby had faith in his genius. Well, now he proceeded to prove that faith.

He had gone round and round the square, cogitating and struggling. Now, all at once, he wheeled about and went back toward his lodging; and now he walked so buoyantly, with such a martial tread, that folks seeing him said:

"There goes a youngster on whom the sun shines!"

Once more in his room, he sat down at his tottery oak center table and composed swiftly—not a poem, but a letter, and it was distinguished by a great freedom of the personal pronoun, for his ego was in the thing:

DEAR SIR OR MADAM, as the case may be—for you will admit that the initials "J. W." do not distinguish you sexually: Providence drops an indiscriminate dew on the weeds and flowers that make up humanity, and joy and sorrow are Siamese twins. I have found your ring, but *I shall not return it to you*. Not to-day, and not to-morrow. I shall return it some day, because it is yours, and finding does not make it mine. I hope the restoration will take place within three months from this morning, but until that time I shall fail to appear at No. — Waverley Place, and if in the meantime you should happen to move, you must leave your address, so that I can follow you up with your property. For, believe me, it shall never for an instant cease to be your property in my thoughts and intentions. I am merely going to borrow it for that length of time. I shall tell you why:

I am, my dear J. W., a poet. I am just finishing a small group of poems that will make me famous. The publishers are waiting for the verse. In six weeks I shall have finished. Oh, six glorious weeks of creation! And you are to be a partner in my success, for your ring is going to feed me while I write. Who is it says: "He who eats may write?"

When I found your ring, I was destitute. For weeks the sights and sounds and griefs

and joys of the city, and my own faith and ambition, have fed me, but my stupid body has not coöperated in the worthy work, and I was just facing the problem of physical survival when this diamond streamed its spectrum rays across my path, and now I shall live to write my verses. I shall pawn your ring.

I shall redeem it. I shall bring it to you. I hope you will be there to receive it, for I shall come in person and bring a volume of my poems.

My self-faith probably sounds grotesque to you, or gigantically conceited, or simply mad. But you are wrong.

I love the city. I am singing it in these poems.

I know the power in me ought not to be wasted. It would be grotesque if I starved and so failed to finish my work.

And this ring—well, if it had been an implement of your profession—if you have one; I think you have—or if it had been your clothes to keep you warm, or food for your ribs, or a roof for your candle to blacken while you worked at nights—I should return it. But a ring, a diamond ring—that is a luxury, a trifle, an indulgence. You can spare it.

The sum you offer as a reward you may keep. It is what I shall pay you for the use of your gem. And meantime I borrow this gem from you, from an unknown creditor who can neither refuse the loan nor grant it with those airs of patronage that usually follow these transactions and humiliate the borrower and even disturb that free spirit in which he should create his works. I am, J. W., most faithfully yours.

THE FINDER OF THE RING.

P. S.—I shall dedicate the verses to J. W.

He found an old stamp and posted the letter.

Then he went out and pawned the ring.

The three months had gone. Kirby's atrocious self-faith had been justified. His verses and his name filled the city one day, and next week they filled the land.

They also filled his modest pocket-book, and out of his first remittances, he sought out the pawnshop and redeemed the diamond ring.

He turned toward Waverley Place and sought No. —. In his pocket was

a presentation copy of his poems, the poems dedicated to J. W. He was full of curiosity, of a burning impatience to behold the unknown, involuntary friend who had made his success possible. Lately, somehow, he had come to picture J. W. as a woman. Maybe that was the poet's way.

He found the number, and he was vaguely disappointed. The house was a very old one—built, it was said, when a creek ran down Sixth Avenue—and it was close up to the thunderous L, but it was quaint, and, sure enough, it had flower boxes at the windows. He rang the bell.

The landlady answered. She was a small woman in a smock, and she had keen, friendly eyes. He asked for J. W.

"J. W.?" repeated the smocked woman softly. "Whom do you mean?"

"I'm answering an ad," he said, smiling. "It was signed 'J. W.' You see, that's all I have to go by. It was this number. Don't tell me J. W. has gone away."

The woman regarded him for some seconds. Then she asked him in. She took him into a little studio, where she explained that she lived, for she rented out the other studios to two or three artists. Then she asked him when he had seen the ad.

"It was three months ago, in January," he said.

She bent over with clasped hands on her knees.

"Have you brought something for J. W.—something that you found?"

"Yes."

"And you wrote her a letter three months ago, saying that you would bring it—now?"

"Yes, yes! And I see it all—she has gone away! I'm exceedingly disappointed. I hoped she'd be here. It's too early to go away for the summer. But perhaps she's in another part of town?"

"No." The smocked woman twisted her hands and suddenly got up. "I have a letter for you. She asked me to give it to you, just before she left. It will tell you everything." She was staring at him. "She did believe you'd bring the r—the thing you found! She did believe!"

And as if wondering at such a corroboration of such a faith, she went out and came back presently with a sealed envelope, which she gave into Kirby's hands. Then she left him alone to read it.

But while she had been gone, Kirby had been thinking, and he did not immediately open the letter or so much as look at the handwriting. He sat now and stared around the room, and reflected upon the entrance to the house and the ancient staircase and the narrow hall. Art might live here, and did evidently live here, and happily and sanitarily; but opulence did not live here. Then it was not opulence that had lost the diamond ring.

With an extremely thoughtful expression, particularly for a poet, he gazed at last upon the letter in his hands.

"To the Poet of the Ring. Addressed."

It was clear, direct writing, rather ugly and very individual. He tore open the envelope. This was the letter:

To the Keeper of Self-Faith—from the Unknown—hail!

You have kept your promise! You have redeemed your debt—both of your debts! You have given the world what you owed it, and you have brought me back what you owed to me. You have brought me your book and my ring.

Oh, my friend, don't think I don't thank you. I thank you for both. If I could only shake your hand and sit down chummylike beside you and talk it all over with you! You say I am a sharer in your book of verse, and I like to think that. I am so glad you found the ring!

You see, it wouldn't have done me any good. Can you fancy the adventure the

ring was bent on when I lost it? Well, the very adventure that did befall it, in your hands. I was taking it—I have to put down the pen and laugh, my dear friend—I was taking it to be pawned!

I don't want you to recoil when you read that, my friend. Suppose I had pawned it. I couldn't have lived, you know—only for a little while longer, in some silly mountains that I don't know and don't want to know anything about. Oh, if I had gone away from my city—our city, poet!—and died in some sanitarium, among a lot of lungers like me!

That's what I should have done, and even now just to think of it gives me the most horrible feeling! I like to reach out and touch the walls of my little studio, and know that sure enough I'm here and will be here when the Unknown sends its advance agent snooping around to tell me it is time to go. That won't be very long. When you read this, I shall have gone—long enough to have got used to the new place, I dare say, and maybe to have rather liked the change, after all. I imagine it's a very splendid move, don't you? So much better than sanitariums and mountains!

About the ring—I kept it till the very last because my lover gave it to me. He moved on five years ago. It doesn't do, does it, to begin wondering if we might miss finding each other in the Next Place? Oh, I shall find him! I feel really sure of it.

I want you to know—just to know, because I say it, and you do believe in me that much, don't you?—that I'm glad, glad you found the ring! Your letter made me that way. At first, when I'd just lost it,

and advertised for it, it seemed a terrible loss, but now I'm just nothing in the world but glad. You see, I, too, love the city. I wanted to paint it, just as you want to write it. I didn't want my force to be wasted. But— Well, you see!

But if the ring has helped you, everything turns out right. Oh, my friend, succeed! Succeed for us both! Make our city as splendid to others as it is to us! Give me your pledge, in this ring that was my lover's and mine, that you will be big for our city!

If I could only read your poems! But how do I know I can't?

I thank you for dedicating them to me.

And then she signed her name.

When Kirby could see, he took out the ring and held it in his palm. It glowed as it had never glowed before.

When he heard the smocked woman coming, he put it back in its place. The smocked woman came in.

"Did she—did she leave any of her paintings around?" he asked diffidently.

The woman nodded.

"There's one you were to have, if you asked for one. This is it." And she gave him a sketch of the city.

He took it and left the house.

A few weeks later, two of his poems came out and electrified the country.

Kirby's biographers will note the fact that it was from this date that he wrote the poetry that was really great.



MAGIC

LAST night a maiden sowed one glance
Within the garden of my heart.
To-day, by some magician's art,
Love blooms there in full radiance.

PERCY WAXMAN.



What makes the super-woman? Is it beauty? Cleopatra and Rachel were homely. Is it daintiness? Marguerite de Valgis washed her hands but twice a week. Is it wit? Pompadour and Du Barry were avowedly stupid in conversation. Is it youth? Diane de Poitiers and Ninon de l'Enclos were wildly adored at sixty. Is it the subtle quality of feminism? George Sand, who numbered her admirers by the score—poor Chopin in their foremost rank—was not only ugly, but disgustingly mannish. So was Semiramis. Here are the stories of super-women who conquered at will. Some of them smashed thrones; some were content with wholesale heart-smashing. Wherein lay their secret? Or rather, their secrets? For seldom did any two of them follow the same plan of campaign.

MARGUERITE STEINHEIL, ARCHADVENTURESS

IF it weren't for Baedeker," said the tourist—this was before the war forced patriotic Yankees to "see America first"—"if it weren't for Baedeker, what would be the sense of going to Europe? There would be no guidebooks for us to verify."

To tell Marguerite Steinheil's story is as thankless as verifying Baedeker. For her trial is not yet ten years old, and every one has read all about her.

Not greatly desiring to be sued for libel—and still less desiring to have the editor of *AINSLIE'S* stop my Super-women series on account of such a suit—I shall add nothing to the testimony brought out at the trial and in the newspapers and in the heroine's own memoirs. Those combine to make a mighty thrilling tale as they stand.

Familiar as my story may be to you, I think you will read it. For there is an odd twist to human nature that leads one to prefer hearing again what he has

already heard rather than listening to something new. Witness the noise that greets an old vaudeville jape and the puzzled silence that follows a brand-new quip. Incidentally, you would look with keen interest at a photograph of your own bedroom, and would revel in the bliss of identifying its familiar details. But you would yawn over a photographic panorama of Lhasa or Teheran. Emerson expressed the same idea much better and more tersely when he counseled:

Teach men what they knew before.
Paint the prospect from their door.

Which brings us by easy stages and uneasy apologies to Marguerite Steinheil.

She began life, in 1869, as Marguerite Japy, daughter of a well-to-do family of the French upper-middle class. Lombroso describes her parents as "heavy drinkers and gross sensualists," and

pays Marguerite, herself, this flattering tribute:

"She is an hereditary hysterical degenerate. She has the true degenerate's wide jaw and large cheek bones. Her love career began very early."

Marguerite herself admits:

"It was when I was seventeen that I had my first love affair."

Her brother's chum, Lieutenant Scheffer, was the man in the case. There was a violent little romance; there was a six-day absence from home, which has been variously explained; and the Japys positively forbade the match.

"I was broken-hearted!" writes Marguerite, in her memoirs.

"My ideals were shattered!" testified Scheffer at her trial, twenty-two years after.

Please don't forget Scheffer. He comes into our story again, in a fashion worthy of Dumas at his worst or a dime-novel author at his best.

Any further girlish amours of Marguerite may as well be slurred over. It is enough to say she was beautiful—or, rather, intensely pretty—that she was splendidly educated, a brilliant talker, an accomplished musician, and that even at the bread-and-butter age, she had the elusive wonder charm that makes fools of men. In other words, she was a typical super-woman.

When she was twenty, a more or less famous painter fell crazily in love with her. He was about twice as old as she, and was a forceless, hesitant, nervously nonaggressive chap, whose fitness for the alluring rôle of "complacent husband" seems to have been ideal.

"At least forty, short, thin, with small eyes—he didn't please me at all," writes Marguerite.

But he pleased her parents, which, in France, was more to the point. And they smiled eager encouragement on his shy courtship. He was Adolphe Stein-

heil, nephew of the great painter, Meissonier.

According to Marguerite, who should have known, many of Steinheil's paintings were shipped to America and sold here as genuine Meissoniers.

"Monsieur Steinheil," she writes, "added himself to my list of suitors; which already included two officers, a lawyer, a rich nobleman, a lecturer, and a fat manufacturer."

She and Steinheil were married in July, 1890, and went to live in the gloomy old-fashioned Steinheil home, at 6 Impasse Ronsin, in the better part of Paris' Latin Quarter; a house to be stared at in fascinated horror, one day, by practically every one in the whole city.

The house was gloomy, the furniture was gloomier, the bridegroom's mother was gloomiest. His prim sister also lived with the young couple. And there was an air of dowdiness and of fried onions about the place that the bride peevishly resented.

For a year or so, the Steinheils dwelt on in dull respectability. A daughter—Marthe—was born to them. Then came a family clash, whose nature need not be touched on here.

"For a reason I will not tell, nor even hint at," say the memoirs, "I decided to divorce my husband. But after a painful conversation, we agreed, for love of Baby Marthe, to remain in the same house with each other. But it was stipulated that we were to live as mere acquaintances, and not to be held accountable to each other for our actions. I continued to do all for my husband's success. But my dream of love and happiness was hopelessly shattered. I was incapable of dumb resignation. I knew I should die, unless I lived intensely, ardently, feverishly."

One likes to think that Marguerite set out in married life with the resolve to "play fair," and that the cataclysm that drove her to seek love else-

where was the fault of her afterward complacent husband and not hers. For that matter, one always likes to think a number of things.

In any case, now that she had the whip hand, Marguerite promptly changed the dull routine of the grim old house. No longer were her mother-in-law, her sister-in-law, and the ugly antique furniture allowed to darken her days. No longer was she content with her husband's staid friends and their uninspiringly virtuous wives.

Sunlight poured into the dark home on the Impasse Ronsin. And less desirable things poured in along with it. Marguerite's salons were the gathering place of sculptors, government officials, authors, nobles, rich bourgeois, foreigners of distinction, and so forth, and of women who had beauty enough and fascination enough to cloak the umber splashes in their lives.

Money, too, poured in from one source and another—in fact, from many sources. For by this time Paris had "discovered" Marguerite, and her admirers were legion.

Among these admirers and frequenters of her salons were Massanet, divine composer; Zola, greasy realist and genius; Pierre Loti, flaming word painter; François Coppée, lord of the short story; Sadi Carnot; Henner; the tremendously infatuated old artist, Bonnant; and a score of other immortals.

Here, too, again and again, appeared a plump, grizzle-bearded, blue-eyed Englishman whose clothes and manners were the despairing envy of five continents; a man who, to do him justice, seldom threw away a chance to win the favor of a beautiful and attractive woman. Once Marguerite complimented him on his excellent command of French. He replied laughingly:

"I am told I speak it too grammatically. My French is too perfect to be—perfect. When I am in France, I enjoy life and look about me and talk. In

Germany, I look about me and let others do the talking. In England— Well, I can't tell you what I do in England, for that would be divulging state secrets."

This pilgrim to the Steinheil shrine was Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, afterward Edward VII., King of England.

A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband. Marguerite Steinheil was a gold-studded meal ticket to hers. Orders for portraits rushed in on Adolphe Steinheil from all quarters. He was kept busy—and at prices he had never hitherto dreamed of getting—filling orders from some of the richest men in France. Wealth was coming his way, and he showed rare tact in not looking too closely into its source. He was much away from home, nowadays—and nowanights—and at stated intervals; the intervals being stated by the woman who was, in name, his adorable wife and, in fact, was his decidedly profitable business partner.

The capital prize in Marguerite's love lottery was drawn one day at the Long-champs races, when, through Judge Lemercier, she met Felix Faure, President of the French Republic.

From the first, Faure was her helpless worshiper. Even in her whitewash-colored memoirs, Marguerite does not bother to deny the affair. Almost at once, it became public property.

Day after day, night after night, the president called at the Impasse Ronsin house. When this was not convenient, Marguerite went to visit him at the Elysée Palace, where an attendant was waiting to admit her through a little side door in the garden at the corner of the Avenue des Champs Elysées and the Rue du Colisée.

Faure, like the rest, commissioned the worthy Adolphe Steinheil to paint his portrait.

The Faure affair had about it a tinge of the political, such as Marguerite

loved. She admits that the president used her as an agent, in a measure as a spy, and in other capacities, in his dealings with fellow statesmen. She gives, as excuse for their countless hours spent together, that she was helping him write a private history of modern France, so full of perilous state secrets that he dared trust no one else to collaborate with him. What became of this alleged private history no one knows. It was not found among Faure's papers.

He and she had a cipher system of correspondence, too, she says, because Faure thought spies were meddling with their letters. A seal of white wax on a note, for instance, meant "urgent;" blue wax meant something else, and so forth.

Faure, according to the memoirs, gave her a priceless necklace made up of five strands of big matched pearls. He sent her this in a golden box, buried in a bouquet of orchids, using Major Lamy as his messenger.

"I bought the pearls to oblige a friend," Faure told her. "I am forever disgraced and lost if any one chances to hear about them. Take the necklace, I implore you, and guard it for me. But do not wear it yet, or show it to any one."

Marguerite obligingly took it. Once, she says, she suggested that he might like to have it back. But he cried out in alarm:

"No! No! Do you want me to be ruined?"

Remember that necklace. We shall hear more of it.

One day, Faure received visits from the Prince of Monaco and from an archbishop. After they had gone, he seemed greatly agitated—the joint call of an archbishop and of the man who makes his living from the Monte Carlo gambling tables would seem almost enough to agitate any host—and sent posthaste for Marguerite. He and she

were closeted for some time in his study.

Then shriek after shriek brought a throng of palace attendants on a run to the study. A queer tableau—so runs the oft-printed story, for which I do not vouch—confronted them as they burst in.

Slumped back in a chair beside his desk sat President Faure—stone dead. Beside him, on the desk, was a vial of heart stimulant, a fact made much of by apologists. On her knees at the president's feet knelt Marguerite Steinheil, writhing and screaming. She could not move, because both the dead man's hands were gripped deep in the masses of her gold-red hair.

So tightly were the stiffening fingers entwined in it that it was necessary to cut away much of the hair in order to free the frantic woman. She was hustled out of the palace by a secret exit and back to her own home.

The doctors presently announced the death of Felix Faure—from heart failure. They also spoke solemnly of the bottle of stimulant and its probable effect on a heart too weak to withstand it. Faure was known to have suffered, for a long time, from defective heart action.

But somehow the story of Marguerite's presence became public property. It found its way into type—not only in France, but in America and other countries—even to the episode of the death grip on the woman's hair. People began to shun Marguerite. It was actually hinted that she had poisoned the president. This latter rumor is too silly to merit denial. Yet it was circulated in some of the newspapers. Other sheets hinted still more broadly at a far likelier cause for the feeble-hearted man's death.

Marguerite, herself, denied that she was with Faure when he died. She said he fell back fainting in his chair while she was in the study, but that he

presently rallied, and she went home. Her tale was not generally believed.

Anonymous letters poured in on her, denouncing her as a murderess. Newspapers referred to the possible poisoner of Faure as "Madame S., wife of a prominent artist."

"As they mentioned no name," she writes in her memoirs, "I was helpless to defend myself in court. Society's doors closed against me. Everybody eyed me askance. But within six months, my receptions were more largely attended than ever."

The next man to stand out from among the ruck of Marguerite's adorers was Sisowath, the black King of Cambodia, who met her at the races and went wild over her. His infatuation was the joke of Paris.

Then she met Maurice Bordevel, a rich widower. She says in her memoirs that she and Bordevel quarreled and parted. The prosecution in the Steinheil case declared otherwise. I will take the latter version.

Ten years had dragged on since Faure's death. Through divers causes, the Steinheils were pinched for ready money. At forty-one, Marguerite was no longer the glowing belle of twenty, though much of her olden beauty clung to her. However, even this remaining beauty was not to last forever, and some means must be found to secure her future.

Her mother, old Madame Japy, was living with the Steinheils now, and Marguerite was not at all fond of her, or of her own sixty-year-old husband. Altogether, it was not a very happy household. Much of its earlier glory had departed.

Bordevel, according to the story, came to Marguerite's rescue by leasing for her a bijou villa at Bellevue. Also, he had hinted that he might be coaxed into marrying her, in case she should become a widow. On religious grounds, he was a bitter opponent of divorce.

On Madame Japy's death, there would also be an inherited fortune of ninety thousand francs for Marguerite. The latter's daughter, Marthe, too, had grown into young womanhood, and was engaged to be married to one Pierre Buisson. And that meant a dowry to pay out.

Thus, argued the prosecution, it was highly to Marguerite's interest that her mother and her husband should depart from this life with all convenient speed.

At six o'clock on the morning of May 31, 1908, the Steinheils' manservant, Remy Couillard, clumped down from his attic room to start the kitchen fire. Midway in his descent, he halted on the stairs, hearing strangled moans and muffled cries for help.

The sounds seemed to come from Marguerite's room, and thither he ran.

He found Marguerite lying in bed, tied hand and foot, and with a gag on the pillow beside her face.

Couillard sprang to the bedside and tore loose the cords that bound her. This was an easy task, he afterward testified, as they were lightly and carelessly fastened.

She sprang up with considerable quickness for a woman who had so long been tied, and the cords, despite her struggles, had left no signs on ankle or wrist. Nor—though she said it had been in her mouth for hours before she could get rid of it—was the gag damp.

Couillard ran into Madame Japy's room. The old woman lay dead in bed. Knotted about her throat was the cord that had strangled her. Adolphe Steinheil lay on the floor of his studio, strangled in like fashion.

Marguerite said she had been awakened at about one o'clock in the morning by three people—two men and a red-haired woman—who had entered her room. They wore masks and long gabardines. (The papers had told of the theft of several gabardines from a Hebrew theater, a few days before.)

The red-haired woman had whispered to Marguerite:

"If you cry out, we will murder your father and mother."

Marthe, for whom the woman seemed to mistake Marguerite, had been sent away to a friend's house on the preceding day. The trio bound and gagged Marguerite, then ransacked the room and, knocking the terrified victim senseless, departed. She recovered consciousness only when she heard Couillard stamping down the stairs five hours later. This was her story.

First came the police; then came the doctors. The former found no clew to the double murder. The latter found no marks of violence on Marguerite.

Marguerite had powerful friends high up in police circles. The investigations were perfunctory. And presently the case was dropped.

But, this time, people would not stop talking. And the talk was not flattering to Marguerite. She loudly demanded justice on the slayers of her dear mother and still dearer husband.

Presently she went a step farther and accused one Alexandre Wolff of the crime. To do this, it was needful to amend the first story she had told the police. And she amended it. Wolff, who was the husband of the housekeeper at Marguerite's Bellevue villa, easily cleared himself. Then he, too, began to talk.

He and his wife told interesting yarns about orgies at the villa that would have made Lucrezia Borgia's nameless revels look like church sociables. And people waxed more and more suspicious.

But it was Marguerite alone who got herself back into the police net. She did it by that fruitful source of all trouble—a letter. She wrote to the newspapers:

"I am on the track of the murderers, at last."

And she went on to demand that the police search the room of her man-

servant, Remy Couillard, for some of the loot carried away by the assassins; notably, for a large missing pearl. The police, thus urged, made the search. Marguerite went to Couillard's room with them. As they entered, she dramatically pointed out an unset diamond that lay in plain sight on the floor. The police warmed up to the hunt and presently found the missing pearl in Couillard's wallet. Things looked uncomfortable for Couillard.

Marguerite went on to elaborate the story of the five-strand pearl necklace President Faure had given her. She said that Steinheil had taken the necklace into his own possession after Faure's death, and had been visited by a mysterious German, who had sought to buy it from him.

At each of the German's many visits, Steinheil had been bullied or cajoled into selling him part of the necklace, until, a fortnight before the murder, only ten pearls had been left. These Steinheil had flatly refused to sell. The German had threatened him, but in vain. Marguerite suggested that the ten pearls—which were now missing—had had something to do with the murder.

Beyond Marguerite's unsupported and delightfully unreliable word, there is no proof that this necklace ever existed. Certainly, the pearl found in Couillard's pocketbook was no part of it. Yet Couillard was none the less in a tight place.

He was saved by a jeweler who came forward with a sworn statement that, two weeks after the double murder, Marguerite had brought him a quantity of jewelry, ordering him to take the gems out of their settings and melt down the gold. The jewelry was part of the plunder she had said the murderers stole.

Marguerite, confronted by this evidence, broke down. She confessed that she had lied about Couillard and that she had "planted" the diamond and the

pearl in his room. She excused her act on the plea that she had been driven temporarily mad by her craving to solve the mystery.

Of course, all this could have but one result. Public feeling forced the re-opening of the case. On November 26, 1908, Marguerite was arrested, formally charged with the murder of her husband and her mother, and locked up in St. Lazare prison, where she remained for the better part of a year.

Now began a new and interesting series of lies. Marguerite declared that one of the murderers had had a red beard and had worn sandals. This description filled Frederick Burlingham, an American newspaper man, who lodged near the Impasse Ronsin. Burlingham was arrested. Marguerite at once identified him, past all doubt, as one of the men who had entered her room on the night of the double killing.

Burlingham, unluckily for her, proved that on May 31st he was on a Swiss walking tour with Joe Davidson, the artist.

But this failure did not dishearten Marguerite. She made still another statement. She retracted her former stories and again said that the murderer was Alexandre Wolff.

Wolff, she declared, had crept into her room on burglarious intent. She had awakened. He had tied and gagged her.

"My husband heard the noise and came in," she continued. "Alexandre killed him. Then he went into my mother's room and killed her. Then he threatened to murder me, unless I would swear to keep his secret. I swooned, and did not recover my senses until daylight."

Verily, Marguerite was "getting back" at the Wolffs, with a vengeance, for the stories of the villa revels. But Wolff proved an alibi. And the prosecution, digging up the long-forgotten flirtation with Lieutenant Scheffer,

hinted that Wolff was the son of Scheffer and Marguerite.

The press on both sides of the Atlantic smeared the trial story all over their front pages. The sob-sister squad waded knee-deep in emotion over the stricken super-woman and her engaging and engaged daughter. The old Faure skeleton was dragged from its dusty closet and made to rattle its bones. Paris was sharply divided into two factions—for and against the prisoner.

Her case took on a political coloring. The government's opponents fiercely denounced her. This pack was led by a white-bearded writer whose vitriol-steeped pen had been getting him—and others—into difficulties since before the days when Napoleon III. had exiled him from France—along with Victor Hugo—for lampooning the imperial dynasty. The man was Henri Rochefort. He clamored with loudly unceasing fury for the conviction and guillotining of Marguerite.

The prisoner used her daughter to the full. She wept publicly at the thought that Marthe's beloved fiancé, Pierre Buisson, would now break his engagement. At this terrible possibility, every one wept.

"No!" heroically cried Buisson. "Whatever the outcome, Marthe shall be my wife!"

More tears.

Buisson, he it said, cheerily jilted Marthe as soon as the trial was over. The girl, two years later, married an Italian.

The prisoner's uncle and other relatives came forward with ample funds for the defense—in France, the family comes ahead of all else save the state, and no sacrifice is deemed too great to make for it—and Maître Aubin was employed as Marguerite's chief counsel.

The judge and the prosecutor bombarded Marguerite with cross-questioning. When she was cornered in a lie,

she would swoon. But always she recovered with lightning quickness when an apt retort occurred to her. And Aubin fought brilliantly for every inch of ground.

During the trial, a youth burst into the courtroom yelling that he himself was the murderer. In two minutes, he was proven innocent. Asked why he had tried to incriminate himself, he pointed dramatically at Marguerite and declared:

"It would be bliss to die for her!"

All Paris in tears.

The judge charged the jury strongly against the prisoner, almost commanding them to convict. The jury retired. Presently, back came a note from their foreman, begging an acceptance of the verdict:

"Guilty with extenuating circumstances."

The judge sternly sent word:

"No. It must be 'Guilty' or 'Not guilty.'"

A little later the jury returned with the unanimous verdict:

• "Not guilty!"

In face of the evidence, this verdict of twelve otherwise sane men was perhaps the mightiest tribute ever paid to a super-woman's lure.

The crowd went mad with delight. Paris went madder with delight. The sob sisters went maddest with delight.

Thousands of people, convinced that Marguerite was guilty of a purposeful and cold-blooded double murder, had nevertheless yearned for her acquittal, and howled with joy at learning of it.

Aubin—lauded by the press as if he were a second Napoleon—embraced his colleagues. Then he embraced Marguerite—who had swooned, once more, amid a cloudburst of tears—and, lifting his fair client in his arms, bore her from the courtroom.

The reporters set off in hot pursuit after the automobile wherein Aubin had lifted the veiled and drooping fig-

ure. Reporters, photographers, idlers, chased the automobile for more than an hour. At the end of that time, Aubin halted his car and allowed the pursuers to catch up. He thanked them for their kind interest and introduced them to his veiled companion—a dressmaker's dummy swathed in a mourning veil.

Marguerite, also veiled, had walked out of court unnoticed. She also passed unnoticed out of history, followed by a last scathing editorial by Henri Rochefort, part of which I am going to quote, if you don't object:

"Of course she did not kill her husband. The law has said so, and the law is supreme. She could not have killed her mother, say the jury. She never put the pearl into Couillard's pocketbook and never falsely identified the American journalist Burlingham as one of the assassins—as seemed to be proven in the trial.

"These things being as they seem, it follows that she is a model of all the virtues. She deserves to be decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor. Having been commended for her skill in dramatic portrayal, she deserves to be engaged for leading rôles at the *Comédie Française*. The exuberant public should insist that the government vote her a pension large enough to provide her with a competence for the rest of her life.

"No one can doubt, from the wild enthusiasm over her, that she is a genuine public benefactor, deserving the most lavish tributes of her country's affection."

An American newspaper man summed up the case more tersely:

"Of course they acquitted her," he said. "The best defense a woman can have against a murder charge is that she is good looking. No moderately pretty woman, in more than a century, has been put to death by the law. Hence, all moderately pretty women must be innocent. Or else——"



A Permanent Fixture

By Katharine Baker

Author of "The Advertising Agent," "Cinderella Crosses the Rubicon," etc.

SO Mr. Wiltscher sent me off. He'd been cross that day, running in and out of all the offices and scolding the girls.

Four of the congressmen clubbed together and kept Mr. Wiltscher for head clerk, and then they each hired a stenographer, and of course it was cheaper. I worked for Mr. Carman of New York.

At six o'clock, Mr. Wiltscher bustled in to look over the last mail. I'd untied it and slit the envelopes.

Suddenly he shouted at me for the files about the Harristown post office. He fumbled them and muttered. He stopped and glared at me.

"Well," he snarled, "of all the sap-heads I ever employed in my offices! Look at that!" He handed me a carbon copy I'd made the week before. "Read that paragraph!" he roared.

I read it. My congressman always used long words. It sounded exactly like him. I could fairly hear him rolling out things ending in "ation" and "ishment," as I read. Like "embellishment," you know, for instance, and "colonization."

"Isn't it right? What's wrong with it, Mr. Wiltscher?" I ended feebly.

Mr. Wiltscher looked stupefied.

"Good Lord!" he said. "The little fool can't even see her mistakes when you point them out! No, miss, it isn't right! The congressman didn't say, 'This considerable graft on the treasury'—he said 'draft.' Of course that's what he said! I never saw it, but com-

mon sense tells me so. And he didn't say, 'Your proposition would appall any fair-minded citizen'—he said 'appeal to.' That's obvious."

I felt uncomfortably guilty.

"The congressman must have signed that letter, without reading it over, and, judging from the reply, he'll have to persuade his constituent of the fact, if he wants to come back. I may lose my job." At the moment I didn't care if he did, but he went on, "This is where you lose yours. I've stood enough of your incompetence. You needn't report to-morrow."

He flung a ten-dollar bill on the desk and stamped out.

Everybody was gone. A scrub-woman peered in, saw me, set down her pails, and trudged off with the scrap basket. I put away the post-office files, dropped my machine, and shut my desk.

I went to the window to get the little *Aspidistra* the superintendent of the Botanical Gardens had given me. I doted on it, because it was the only plant I could ever persuade to live. My plants all have "celerity in dying," like the Queen of Egypt.

But I decided that it was really Mr. Carman's property, and I'd no right to take it. I put it back.

I washed my hands and took my hat from the tree; and then I realized sharply that I hadn't a job any longer, and I hadn't saved money on ten dollars a week, and I was so dispirited, I felt sure I'd never find another place,

and I sat down in a big leather chair and laid my head on the table.

Somebody rested a heavy hand on my shoulder and spoke to me. I knew his voice. It was the fat congressman from the opposite office. I shook off his hand.

He said: "What are you crying about?"

And I said indignantly: "I'm not a slave! I presume I can cry when I want to."

And he said: "Can't slaves?"

I giggled a little, hysterically.

"Why should they?" I inquired. "Slaves never lose their job. When slaves get wished on to anybody, he can't escape."

"H'm!" said the congressman. "That it? My secretary has the measles. You might try my office for a week or so, while you're looking round."

"You're awfully good," I said. But I had to confess. "You don't realize. You couldn't want me. I'm a perfectly rotten stenographer. Toward evening, when people use long words, my mind turns foggy, like when you try to read the Banking and Currency Act, and I tangle my dictation. I just got Mr. Carman into a frightful hole with a constituent."

"I can see you landing a job! So much tact!" said the fat congressman admiringly. "But it's all right with me. I don't use long words. I never advanced far beyond the primer. If you can pass the Binet tests for a six-year-old, you can't fail to get me. Come in about nine-thirty to-morrow."

Mr. Pride of Connecticut had roamed down the corridor, and stuck his head in at the opposite door. Now he turned and saw us.

"Hello, Hammond!" he called. "Want you to motor out with my party to Dower House for dinner."

"Where's that? Don't know it," replied my new employer, and went over.

I put on my coat. They stood in

the doorway opposite. Mr. Pride kept facing me. He's extremely handsome.

"Hunting lodge of the first Lord Baltimore," he explained. "Very chic. By invitation only. Not to know argues yourself unknown."

"Educate me," said Judge Hammond simply.

My spirits had risen. I cocked my hat very bias and went into the marble hall. Mr. Pride still stared.

"Oh, where are you going,
With your lovelocks flowing?"

he remarked audibly, as I passed.

"Where indeed?" said Judge Hammond grimly.

Next morning I sat at my new desk pounding out addresses. Beside me on the floor were piles of canvas bags, gray with bands of thirteen blue stripes, and filled with dull literature which I was to sow broadcast through Judge Hammond's district.

The girl from the next office brought in a bundle the mail clerk had left in her room by mistake. She recognized me and frowned.

"Changed offices, child?" she asked.

I nodded. She came over to me. She was a broad-shouldered, substantial creature, homely and nice.

"Look here, little girl," she remonstrated, "don't you need advice? It's a bad thing, this changing all the time."

"But what can you do when you're fired?" I defended myself. "As soon as people find out what a miserable stenographer I am, they don't want me any more."

She laughed and shook her head reprovingly.

"That's all very well while you're a lovely little thing," she said. "But hardly any of us marry merchant princes, in spite of the magazine stories. If you're not going to soldier on life, you've absolutely got to produce the goods. You must stick, child, you *must* stick. Of course it's none of my business."

She turned to go.

"How could I keep this job?" I appealed to her. "Judge Hammond's stenographer will get over her measles, and she's sure to be better than I am."

"As far as she's concerned," announced my neighbor, "she's engaged. She may not return at all. But if you don't make good, you can't expect even a generous man to keep you for charity's sake."

Wasn't that a hateful speech? It stung. She smiled at me pleasantly and went out.

I began writing with fervor, as if I had to make good for life before noon that day. I hardly looked up when Mr. Pride of Connecticut entered.

He had on brown clothes. You wouldn't believe that a man could look distinguished and elegant in a brown suit, but he did. He was very deferential, and asked for the judge.

I said he'd gone to the departments. Mr. Pride came over and faced me, hat in hand.

"Judge Hammond was telling me you were in his office temporarily," he began. "Now, if nothing better offers, when your work here ends, I can easily use a stenographer to assist my clerk. There's a lot of rush work in seed distribution coming on."

"Oh, thank you," I answered gratefully. "You're most kind. I'll certainly come to you if Judge Hammond's secretary returns."

"Good. That's a bargain," said Mr. Pride.

He shook hands. After he dropped my hand, he kept his eyes bent on me. I'd had too much disapprobation lately.

"What are you looking at me for, Mr. Pride?" I asked uneasily.

"Oh, it's no trouble." He swung away.

Well, he had a charming, friendly manner. What if I do resent brown clothes?

I wrote on at the envelopes until a keen-looking business man sauntered through the open door. He offered me his card. Polar City. So he was a constituent.

I said the congressman had gone to the war department, to rescue the fish pounds in his district from an insane ruling, and I didn't think he would be back before the House sat, and he was going to make a speech, so he'd be sure to be on the floor in the afternoon.

"Left home forever, eh?" said the constituent amiably.

I smiled back at him. One of the first things you learn is to make yourself agreeable to constituents.

"You were not here last time I went through," he hazarded. "Taking your mother's place, I presume."

"She's not my mother," I explained. "She's engaged, and fortunately she has the measles."

He seemed interested. He sat down near me and asked me about everything. So I told him my troubles.

He picked up some of the pamphlets and leafed them over.

"Literature," he commented, "to the end that no pound or line fisherman, returning at sundown from the sea, shall be compelled to pass an unprofitable evening without Bulletin No. 204 on 'The Cultivation of Mushrooms,' or Bulletin No. 223 on 'Miscellaneous Cotton Insects in Texas.' Jiminy, won't these take, down home? And you supinely address all this rubbish without remonstrating?"

"If you'd lost as many jobs as I have," I said, "you'd send 'The Menace' to Cardinal Gibbons, or 'The Fatherland' to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, without a word, if your employer told you to."

The constituent leaned forward, dangling "Miscellaneous Cotton Insects" in manicured fingers between his well-creased knees.

"See here, child," he admonished me, "you've got the wrong line on your job."

Complaisance is cheap. You secure it to the *n*th power in a rubber stamp. What employers want is common sense. That is above rubies. In fact, no employee ever had it. Bet you the lady with the measles was a dead one, letting the department unload this stuff on a maritime district. But you put your mind on fish. Don't send news about the boll weevil to a sea captain. Thus you may achieve unique honor and credit, and probably have a statue erected to you by employers."

He stood up.

"Well," he said, "so endeth the morning lesson. I'll go over and look up the congressman. Is that what I ought to call him? What's the strictly correct thing?"

I reflected.

"They say in Washington that all the tall, thin ones are 'colonel,'" I told him, "and all the short, fat ones are 'judge.' But when one is tall and fat like Judge Hammond, I suppose it might possibly depend on his true character. Perhaps they allow him 'judge' on the ground that he was a genuine judge before he came to Washington. But maybe even that wouldn't count."

The constituent stood smiling down at me.

"I'm very much obliged to you for your advice," I added. "I'll try to find out about fish."

"Good girl!" he approved me. He hesitated. "You couldn't show me my way, I suppose?"

"Why, of course," I replied. I jumped up and put on my hat and coat.

We set out across the capitol grounds, under trees covered with green lace.

"Your representative's in bad, little rubber stamp," he remarked conversationally as we went along. "The crooks in office in Polar City have their knives out for him. They're only waiting for the final passage of the Rivers and Harbors Bill. Then they'll raise a howl

that he didn't get an appropriation for Polar Harbor. They'll call it inefficiency or treachery."

We stopped between the elevators in the hall, with its ugly, worn yellow tiles.

"Could you take me up to the gallery first for a while, until we see the congressman come in?" he urged.

So I did. The speaker sat aloft, majestic and rather scornful, looking like a Roman consul who has renounced the world and been done in marble. Then he descended from his chair, and a little long-nosed man took his place and rattled around in it—like the Bible, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."—and the sergeant at arms lifted the mace off its pedestal, and members began to bore us with high-flying thoughts in committee of the whole on the state of the Union, and I sat worrying and wondering how people become efficient and invaluable to their employers.

After a while, a floor leader said, "I yield seven minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey," and the chairman said, "The gentleman from New Jersey is recognized for seven minutes," and Judge Hammond got up. He made a statistical speech, the kind men like, very improving.

He ended by saying they'd given the bill fair discussion. In an instant, Mr. Pride was on his feet, interrupting.

"Doesn't the gentleman feel that to be disingenuous, knowing well, as he does, that every vote on his side of the House is nailed down?"

"On this side, and more particularly on that, it may be," agreed Judge Hammond calmly.

The constituent grinned. The House applauded.

"I will not deny," rejoined Mr. Pride, "that I stand with my party on this question, and all hell can't change my vote."

"I would say to the gentleman that all hell is doubtless satisfied with his

vote as it is," conceded Judge Hammond.

There was a general uproar. The long-nosed man could not cope with it. After it died, he said, "The time of the gentleman from New Jersey has expired."

The floor leader said he yielded five minutes to the gentleman from somewhere else. I glanced up at the constituent.

"I think it was an awfully clever speech, don't you?"

He looked quizzical.

"I'd hardly expect you to appreciate it. Can one buy such loyalty?" he inquired. But after a minute he added, "Sure, it was a good speech. And you're a good little rubber stamp, and very kind. Now I guess I'll send in my card to the congressman."

I took him down to the House floor and delivered him to a page, and then I went over to the document room to hunt for literature on fish.

They couldn't send it at once, so after luncheon I began to study the dictionary. I'd got as far as "aberration" when the congressman's heavy tread echoed down the hall. He fussed around the table a while and then came and leaned on the side of my desk like an overgrown boy.

"Did you hear my speech?" he asked diffidently.

I nodded.

"Like it?" he pressed me, with a foolish expression.

"It reminded me a good deal of Oscar Underwood," I said.

He flushed with pride.

"Sort of dreary, you know," I went on, "and yet awfully convincing and sincere sounding."

"Well, upon my word, you're frank! Is that a compliment?" he asked scornfully.

"I think it is," I said. "Mr. Underwood makes my head ache, but he can make me believe anything he pleases."

"I've spoiled you already. You're too independent for a stenographer, miss," he reproved me, and disappeared behind his screen, chuckling, just as Mr. Carman stalked across the hall.

I was in a panic. The dictionary fell to the floor.

"What's this Wiltscher tells me about dismissing you?" he scolded.

"It was inexcusable in me, Mr. Carman," I stammered. "I'm so ashamed. I'm studying the dictionary now, and I'll never do such a thing again."

"Nonsense!" denied Mr. Carman benevolently. "Wiltscher's action was intemperate and unconsidered. You may return at your convenience."

He beamed kindly over his spectacles. He was a dusty little man with an oval figure.

"Oh, Mr. Carman," I deprecated his kindness, "Mr. Pride of Connecticut was here this morning, and I promised to go into his office when Judge Hammond's secretary comes back."

Mr. Carman looked disgusted and went on behind the screen.

"Hear that, Hammond?" I heard him growl. "This d—— popular little stenographer of ours is going to Pride when your secretary comes back."

"The dickens she is!" said Judge Hammond hastily. "Not if I know it! I'm told that fellow leads a double life."

"Double! Quadruple, at the very least," Mr. Carman assured him cheerfully. "He's politically inept and devoid of moral sensibility."

I snatched up the dictionary and searched for "inept." Judge Hammond called me. Mr. Carman brushed by me on my way to answer.

"When are you planning to go to Pride?" inquired the judge.

"When your secretary comes back," I said timidly.

"Not till then?"

"No, sir. Not if you'll keep me."

"It'll be some time," said Judge Hammond dryly. "That's all."

But I lingered.

"There was a man here from Polar City——"

The congressman heard me through, drumming on the desk with his finger ends.

"Nice lot of snakes," he indorsed his absent constituents. "That bill's passed, gone into the Senate. They never even whispered they wanted action. I inquired, but they'd a kind of old, moth-eaten agreement with the government by which it would appropriate fifty thousand for their channel dredge if they'd ante up fifty first themselves. Sort of a Carnegie-library deal. They've never put up their fifty thousand, and I suppose it's outlawed by now. I don't know just what to do."

"Couldn't you go to the senators?" I suggested. "Can't they put in an amendment or something?"

"I'll try it," he assented.

I really had to go in next door to tell the stout Miss Pepper. Her congressman was out, so I "hesitated" round and round the room.

"Mr. Carman wants me back," I boasted.

Miss Pepper typed away furiously.

"It's a great help to have eyes like the sea and a trustful manner," she answered in a disparaging tone. "But of course some day they'll be just plain watery, and need spectacles."

I changed to grapevining.

"And Mr. Pride of Connecticut wants me."

She dropped her hands.

"You won't go to him?"

"When Judge Hammond is through with me, I've promised."

"Oh, you darling little goose," she coaxed me, "stick to the judge forever, then."

The senators obligingly put in an unconditional appropriation for him.

"I've you to thank for suggesting it," Judge Hammond informed me.

I told Miss Pepper about it, but she only scoffed.

"Men always think a brilliant mind goes with a brilliant complexion," she declared. "He'd have taken it to the senators anyway. It was the obvious thing to do."

Congress sat while spring warmed to summer, and the asphalt softened, and colored children played and shouted in the streets all night.

Mr. Carman's new stenographer neglected the Aspidistra. Through the open door I could see its broad leaves turning yellow. Sometimes, when everybody was out, I'd slip over with a glass of water and revive it. But it was pining away in the dry, hot air. And I think it missed me.

In June the measly secretary married.

Mr. Pride changed his brown suit for white silk ones, in which he was most alluring. He stopped by one day, when the electric fan only drove a withering blast.

"You left me in the lurch with my seeds," he reproached me.

"I said, 'After Judge Hammond dismissed me,'" I reminded him.

"Oh, well," he admitted it. "Hot weather. How'd you like to motor a bit in the country? Chevy Chase, for instance?"

I suppose I looked my longing. He went on:

"The president gives a dinner to-night at Dower House. I'm booked for that. But what do you say to motoring out there for tea to-morrow afternoon? Could you get off?"

I was doubtful.

"Huge old trees." He dilated on it. "Woods and a lake. Tea outdoors. There's a great Dane—and a dachshund and a turkey and a muscovy duck. They all gather round and beg for crumbs. Why, your eyes are positively

sparkling, child! You certainly must go."

"What sort of fairy tale are you telling to the baby, Pride?" The congressman loomed up behind him.

"Oh, Judge Hammond," I pleaded breathlessly, "do you think I could get off to go to Dower House to-morrow? Mr. Pride says they've a great Dane and a dachshund and a turkey and a muscovy duck, and they all beg for crumbs!"

Mr. Pride leaned against the door jamb, gay and mocking. The judge measured him a moment with his eyes; then dropped his lids and turned his back.

"No, Mr. Pride, I think not," he decided.

When Mr. Pride was gone, he said:

"If you want to go to the country, I'll take you some day. You remind me if I forget it."

Likely I would, wasn't it? At that moment I did hate Judge Hammond.

Later, when he called me to take some dictation, I noticed the lines in his face and his despondent air. He broke off in the middle of a letter and leaned back.

"To-day the Senate threw out the Rivers and Harbors Bill," he remarked. "They've cut the appropriation from fifty-three to twenty millions and given it to the army engineers to apportion. That's good-by to the Polar City dredge."

I was dismayed. I'd been very proud of my suggestion, but politics began to seem too complicated.

"Wasn't it a perfectly fair appropriation?" I asked.

"Absolutely on the level. The harbor is important."

"Then won't the engineers give you any money?"

"Not likely."

"I should think you'd try," I urged.

"Oh, I suppose I might as well," he yielded. "There's nothing in this po-

litical game. I can't possibly get home for the primaries. The nomination's equivalent to election in our district, but I'll be knifed if I'm away."

He went on dictating. I waited until he stopped.

"I should think," I ventured, "if you wrote a very nice, plain, sensible letter, the kind you do, and had it printed, and sent it to all your constituents—every single one that votes in your primaries—and told them what you are doing and why you can't get away, it would be a good thing."

He weighed the suggestion.

"It might be. A little matter of some twenty thousand letters for you to get out, missy."

"Oh, I could do it," I promised.

And I did get them out, though it kept me working to all hours of the night. I had no time any more to read the dictionary. The judge offered me an assistant, but I refused. Miss Pepper didn't like it.

"You're frightfully pale," she accused me.

"It's this unbecoming dress," I claimed.

"It isn't," she contradicted. "You're pale in your other dress. You used to glimmer red and white at every provocation. Now you're like chalk."

"I'll have to get some of that stationary bloom the congressmen's wives use," I laughed at her.

"You'd better have an assistant," she advised me.

"Thank you," I retorted. "I'll not cut my own throat. If the judge wants to get rid of me, I won't provide a substitute ready to his hand."

"You dippy child!" murmured Miss Pepper compassionately.

But really I was nervous. There'd been a letter in the mail that day from a young man who wanted a secretary's place. The congressman answered it himself. I saw the addressed envelope.

The chairman of Rivers and Har-

bors and the army engineers were splendid about the dredge, and gave Judge Hammond just what he asked. But he didn't get home for the primaries. He spent the whole day in the House, answering roll calls on the War Revenue Bill.

I worked hard, trying to forget what could I do if the congressman was defeated. There are so many ways you can lose your job besides your own inefficiency, and that's enough, goodness knows.

Once I ran over at a favorable moment to water the Aspidistra. It had only two decent leaves left. The others were dry and torn. Mr. Carman seemed satisfied with his new stenographer, but I thought she was pretty mean to my poor little plant.

I came to the office in the evening as usual. It was really the only cool place I had. My boarding-house room was an oven. I transcribed some letters and laid them on the judge's desk to be signed.

He signed a while. Then he sat gnawing the end of a penholder and reflecting.

"It's a piti/ l thing," he began. "This life is the most fascinating of any, and it's as cruel as the grave. Those fellows over there, most of them ambitious and brilliant and hard working and conscientious—they move heaven and earth to serve their constituents, they spend a big slice of their salaries in election expenses every two years, and, like as not, bad times or an unpopular bill comes along about election, and they go down to defeat, without a penny saved, their home business out of gear, their mouths a-thirst with this cursed taste for power, for intellectual intercourse—the best in the country anywhere——"

He broke off and fell to signing letters again.

"Well," I advised him, "don't be defeated."

He grinned at me.

"The worst, after all, is the 'not a penny saved' part. I'm all right there. I saved a few before I entered politics. It's the only safe way. Better a bald head and a bank account, in this game."

He threw down the pen and leaned back.

"It's been a trying summer," he said. "You've worked hard. You've had ten dollars a week regularly. This week isn't quite over, but——"

He picked up a check book. Was he going to say he didn't need me any longer?

Mr. Carman came shouting in.

"Any returns, Hammond?"

Judge Hammond threw down the check book.

"No," he answered.

I gathered up the letters and made way for Mr. Carman. He stopped and looked me over.

"You startlingly resemble an hallucination," he declared.

I laughed.

"I'll try to find myself in the dictionary," I told him. "I haven't quite finished the G's yet"

"You are fading away," he maintained.

"You could grant me a last wish, Mr. Carman," I said with sudden effrontery.

"Let me hear it," he temporized.

"Please, could I have the Aspidistra. It's nearly dead, really."

The master of long words gazed at me, baffled.

"What is an Aspidistra?"

When he heard, he bestowed it on me. I ran and fetched the plant to our own window sill.

I folded the letters and sealed them. One had to be registered. As I started through the doorway, the telephone rang. I paused. Judge Hammond listened a moment, thanked some one briefly, and hung up.

"Polar City's gone solid against me," he said coolly to Mr. Carman.

That was a terrible shock to me. I wavered by the door a moment, ran into a young man who was dawdling along looking at the name plate, and finally went on around to the post office.

I was gone about five minutes. When I came back, I saw Mr. Carman in his own room, but somebody was talking in ours.

A man's voice said, "Perfectly satisfactory to me," and Judge Hammond responded, "Then you may report for work day after to-morrow."

That must be the stenographer who wrote for a job. The young man said, "Thank you," as he came out from behind the screen.

Suddenly his voice faded. The judge caught me and put me in the huge chair. I felt cool leather against my cheek for an instant, and then nothing.

"You need more books under her feet. She's just a poor little over-worked child." Miss Pepper's indignant tone challenged everybody.

She was bathing my face with ice water. I was stretched on the long oak table, with my feet on a pile of reports.

A sense of injury overcame me. I began to whimper weakly.

"What is it, darling?" Miss Pepper consoled me, drawing my head to her broad shoulder.

"I wanted to feed the great Dane and the dachshund and the turkey and the muscovy duck," I lamented.

Miss Pepper shot an evil glance across me at Judge Hammond.

"If all the men in the world had one neck, I'd enjoy wringing it!" she declared in a blighting tone.

"You couldn't do better," he agreed abjectly.

I sat up.

"My mind must be failing," I said, much embarrassed.

"I'll take you home, dearie," offered Miss Pepper.

The judge had an idea.

"Better let me telephone for a room at the hotel right across the street, a cool, corner room, high up, and you spend the night with her," he suggested eagerly.

Miss Pepper met his proposal with a pitying smile.

"You mean well, but you've a great deal to learn, Judge Hammond," she informed him.

He appeared depressed.

"I'm all right," I assured them.

But I didn't sleep that night.

The congressman was waiting when I dragged my listless feet into the office next morning. To-day I was to be discharged.

He pulled an easy-chair for me around to face his own. He looked worried.

"I'm terribly sorry we lost," I consoled with him.

But we hadn't lost, he said. We'd won. Only Polar City ran amuck.

So he must be worried about discharging me.

"You get ten dollars a week here," he said. "Is that all you have?"

I said yes.

"How do you live on it?"

I laughed bitterly.

"You sleep in a hot little room under the eaves, with brown wall paper and a Brussels carpet and a loose-legged chair," I told him, "and you don't use as much soap as you'd like to when you wash your own clothes at night, and you sew quite late when your head doesn't ache too badly. Of course, hot nights you go home as late as you can, because the room's unbearable. And you lie awake trying to think how you can make yourself indispensable, so you won't lose your job."

The congressman got up quickly and turned his back on me. I looked out,

too, past his wide waist, but I couldn't see any object of interest.

He sat down presently and began tearing something into even strips. It was a leaf of my *Aspidistra*.

"Oh!" I cried, horror-struck. "It *had* only two leaves, and that's one!"

He looked up. His eyes were queer, and he lowered them again.

"Well," he said, "it's done now," and went on deliberately measuring strips. "You need a vacation," he said. "I forgot about Dower House. I told you to remind me. But I was fixing for your vacation. I hired a man last night. He's to come for a month. You've been getting ten a week. It's what you asked. But you remember you said you weren't a slave." He smiled a crooked smile. "Well, I'm no slave driver. I've saved the rest of your salary for you."

He dropped the last bits of my leaf into the wastebasket, and took up his check book. He tore out a check.

"At one hundred and twenty-five a month, this represents your balance," he said.

"I'm not worth a hundred and twenty-five a month," I remonstrated.

"I've found you so," he said.

"There's always extra clerk hire to be considered," I argued. "Hardly anybody pays the whole salary to his secretary. It isn't reasonable."

"I pay it to you," he maintained stubbornly, "and I hope you'll return at the end of your month."

"You won't want me back," I answered with conviction. "As soon as you've tried the young man, you'll wonder how you ever managed to put up with me. I've read the dictionary as far as the G's—I'll have time to finish it this month, won't I?—and I've hunted up all the fish literature there is for your constituents, and I try to think of things they'd like. But I know I'm not an accurate stenographer, and what's the use of pretending?"

Except for saying, "Confound the dictionary! When you go on this vacation, you'll leave the dictionary home," he paid no attention to any of that.

"You will come back?" he asked.

"You're not going to Pride?"

"No," I said. "He wears brown suits. I couldn't bear it."

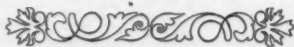
The judge looked relieved.

"They are darned ugly." He passed a thoughtful hand down his expansive side. "A fat man is grotesque enough without them."

"I'm sure to return," I informed him. "I'll never change again if I can help it, and so some day I'll probably be secretary to the president."

The judge wrinkled his eyes half shut and gazed at me.

"If I ever go to the White House, I think I may safely engage to take you along in some capacity," he promised. "And now we've good cause to celebrate. Let's have tea this afternoon with the great Dane and the muscovy duck."



VISION

SOMETIMES the light of pleasure is too bright—

We cannot say what may be near, or far;

But when we mourn alone at dead of night,

Through God's dark glass we see things as they are.

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN.



A Matter of Class

By

Mary Ashe Miller

MARY MAGUIRE leaves you tomorrow, don't she?" asked "Red" Murphy, assistant jailer of Branch No. 3, who had dropped into the Woman's Cottage Branch of the county jail for a little chat with Mrs. Grigsby, the matron.

"Yes, old Mary goes—but I guess it's only for a day or two. She's been with us so many years now—thirty, sixty, or ninety days a dose—that she's more at home here, and she's never among the absent for long. Gets out and keeps sober until she gets together the price of a jag," answered Mrs. Grigsby, who was sunning herself on a bench beneath the high yard wall. "It's a pity, too. She's a fine old woman except for the drink—and the fighting she does when she's stewed," she added with an irrepressible chuckle at the memory of some of Mrs. Maguire's battles.

"They do say she's a corker," said Murphy. "Well, I know how that is, meself. 'Tis the Irish in her. We're all grand fighters if we ever take it up."

"Yes, and she tells me she was born Murphy, herself," laughed Mrs. Grigsby. "If Mary Maguire wasn't spending all her time in jail, though, she'd be at the almshouse, and a lot of 'em say they'd rather be here than over there."

"Now, I wonder what's the reason of that," said Murphy. "They feed 'em just as good over there, and the quar-

ters is as good. People is always takin' out things to them old folks, and no disgrace to it, neither."

"It's a queer notion they have," explained Mrs. Grigsby. "Sort of a matter of class, like, and these old women are great on that. There's a lot of class about what you get run in for among them—if it's getting drunk plain, or drunk and fighting, or stealing, or what not. Then they say it's charity over there, and that's what they hate. It's a worse disgrace to them than coming to jail and serving time. Ah, well, the poor old souls! God knows I try to make 'em as happy here as I can."

"It was a grand thing gettin' these gardens for 'em, now, wasn't it?" asked Murphy enthusiastically. "The boss never had a better idea. Do you have trouble with many of your gang, gettin' 'em to work?"

"No," answered Mrs. Grigsby. "The dope fiends and some of the girls off the town are about the only ones—and the hopheads are 'most too lazy to eat until they've been off it a while. These old drunks here like getting out and digging round in the dirt every day. That's one reason Mary Maguire's sore on going—she's got half her garden vegetables and half flowers and she puts in double time on it."

"Show me it," said Murphy, and he followed Mrs. Grigsby down the neat bricked path to the far end of the great yard, laid out in gardens of every type

and every degree of cultivation. All along the way, they were greeted by women, young and old, clad in the dull gray wrappers that marked them as prisoners, most of whom were busily gardening.

In the corner, stood one of the oldest—a round, rosy, stooped little Irish woman, with merry blue eyes and curly white hair. Vines climbed from her plot high on the eighteen-foot wall; orderly rows of peas were neatly tied up beneath; lettuces and nasturtiums, petunias and spinach, a huge flowering artichoke and some red geraniums, pink and white stock gillies and a purple cabbage or two, rows of parsley and a blossoming red rose, grew flourishingly together.

"Good morning, Mrs. Maguire, ma'am," said Murphy, with a low bow and a flourish of his cap. "'Tis a grand garden you have here, and I hear the mayor's sendin' out to get his vegetables off you these days."

"Go on with you!" scoffed Mrs. Maguire, with a twinkle of her eyes and a wide grin. "The guv'nor's gettin' all I can spare these days, and the mayor's down on the waitin' list, only."

"And you're after leavin' it to-morrow, I hear," said Murphy.

All the laughter fled from the old woman's face. She looked down and bent to tweak a dead leaf from the border of violets.

"Yes, I'm goin'," she answered, with a little quiver in her voice. "Sure, 'tis hard Mrs. Grigsby here's one of the blessed angels come down. Sure, I hate to leave me garden. 'Tis me home here for so long—and since the cottages is give us, who could ask for better? Still, iv'ry time I get out, I swear to meself I ought to try and down the curse of liquor that's on me. If I'm out, though, 'tis livin' with me daughter, and she's too good a woman for me to live with happy all the time," she acknowledged, with a glimpse of the lovable Irish grin

again, "or else over to the almshouse, and bein' on the county that way is hard to come to. And they've no gardens there. Ah, my heart is sad this day!"

"Never mind, Mary," soothed Mrs. Grigsby, patting the bent little shoulder. "You never know what'll happen to you, and even if you don't come back to us, I'll see that your garden gets care, and if you do turn up, you know who'll be glad to have you round again."

"Mrs. Grigsby, darlin', God love ye!" murmured Mary through her tears.

Early the next morning, Mary was ready, dressed in her own rusty black gown and her little black bonnet with its wispy widow's veil. Her "bits of things" were in a neat parcel, and a mixed collection of flowers from her garden was clubbed together in a firm-tied little bunch.

"Nobody would mind me takin' 'em, would they, Mrs. Grigsby?" she asked. "I'd like to show me daughter what we can do out here. She ain't had time to come and see me lately, and she don't know how grand me garden's grewed."

"Take all you like, Mary," said Mrs. Grigsby. "And if you'll wait a minute, you can go down in the sheriff's van. It's being sent in empty, and Murphy spoke to have your ride in that way, if you like."

"Sure, I'm for iv'ry ride I can get in an automobile," said Mrs. Maguire, with her broadest smile. "'Tis a grand way of takin' the air, and so long as Jim Gavigan ain't afraid of me escapin' off him, I suppose he'll leave the doors be open."

"Let me off when ye get to Minna Street, Jim," directed Mrs. Maguire. "I'll go straight to me daughter's and see how she's gettin' on, and leave her have a good look at me cool sober."

When the chauffeur stopped his car, the old woman climbed slowly out, thanking him gayly. Then she paused,

and, peering up into his face, she said with a cunning look:

"Happen ye have the price of car fare with ye, Jim? In case me daughter's moved, ye know."

"Happen I have the price of a beer, you mean, Mrs. Maguire," responded that astute youth. "Not on your life! Say, it's a pity you don't cut out the booze. You'd be the finest kind of an old dame if you'd just get wise to the temperance movement."

"Ye go to the devil with yer impudence!" said Mrs. Maguire, with fire in her eye. "It's a pity there's no one to teach ye manners."

Down the street she plodded, noting with interest matters on all sides. Ninety days had been her most recent portion, and Minna Street can have startling changes in that time.

Mary Maguire had one daughter, Maggie Lorenzini, in whose flesh she was a sad thorn. Maggie, like her father, Timothy, should have been a worthy and well-known citizen of the commonwealth. But, like him, she had that inexplicable mental and spiritual timidity or lack of vision which prevents certain whiter souls from rising very far out of their environment. Matrimonially, they had demonstrated the lack of vision particularly, for neither had chosen either wisely or too well.

Mary Maguire had had undoubted charm and a real, but fluctuating, love for her husband and child; she had had a pretty wit that had reconciled Timmy to many of her shortcomings; she had worked well at intervals, and never in her maddest moments had her husband feared unfaithfulness. But she had had vagaries. Even before "the drink took her," she had neglected her home and her family to roam the streets and visit her friends, of whom she had an endless number in many walks of life. Her appearance had been hailed with joy generally, and by way of celebrating, it

had become customary to "send out the can," and "a dish of suds" had been served to keep Mrs. Maguire's wits scintillating.

Finally, the beer had begun to send her home in the evening cross and nervous. Then whisky had been a need to cheer her up a bit. And from that to mad fits of drunkenness had been only a step.

Timothy Maguire had had virtues by which the saints have undoubtedly preserved him, and chief among them had been his care of Mary, who had by this time been getting toward the sunset of life. He had once been a janitor, but as he had grown older, this had degenerated into odd jobs of cleaning, here and there. He had been careful, thrifty with his small means, and, despite Mary's habits, had managed to keep the wolf a foot or two from the doorstep. He had never worked very far from home, and every week or so his little granddaughter, Rosie Lorenzini, had come scurrying down the street to whisper:

"Oh, grandpa! Come home. Granny's off again."

Then the old man had groaned and shaken his head, with guttural Irish bewailings, and had gone home to his sad, but exciting, task.

Sometimes he had found Mary chuckling and swearing by herself in the kitchen, perhaps claspings a bottle. Then it had been simply a matter of keeping her within doors, giving her more whisky, and putting her to bed to sleep it off.

Frequently, though, he had found the lower steps of his flat surrounded and choked by a highly entertained throng of neighbors. From above stairs had come loud whoops of rage, and Mary had been discovered fighting for freedom, while a mighty police officer amiably held her down.

It had generally been big Jim Duffy who had brought her home, as a cer-

tain degree of instinctive caution had prevented her from running wild too far from her own bailiwick.

"Here ye are, Timmy," Jim had used to say imperturbably. "Here's yer wild Irish rose. I'd a hard time not to run her in to-day. She was all for lickin' the tar out of a strange expressman that give her some lip down on Mission Street. By the grace of the saints, I wandered by in time to save him and get her away. And a busy little stroll it was we had comin' here. She's dev'lish bad to-day."

And old Timmy had shaken his head again and called down weird, but heart-felt, Irish blessings on the head of Officer Duffy, as he had prepared for the fray.

Fortunately he had been a stalwart old man and had had no false ideals as to the methods of dealing with drunken wives of Mary's type. First of all, Officer Duffy had descended the stairway and ordered the neighbors away:

"Clear out, and shame to yez all—hangin' round as though 'twas some-thin' new to see an ould woman drunk! There's many here I've brought home as bad."

Old Timmy had then removed his coat, and as Mary had risen, red-eyed for battle, he had given her one blow with his fist as straight between her eyes as he had been able. This had invariably laid her out for a few minutes, and had brought her up a bit sobered. She had usually been able to recognize him then, and it had been her master's voice for old Mary.

He had sworn and threatened her, while she had dissolved into drunkenly sentimental tears.

Then he had ordered her to bed, and as she lay dazed or sleeping, the old man had poulticed her eyes, bathed her head, soothed her alcoholic fears, and for hours hovered over her with the

tenderest care, until she had emerged sobered, repentant, and ashamed.

Then for a few days old Timmy would have a heavenly time. She would clean the few rooms to the top notch of neatness; she would cook delectable and favorite dishes for him; she would delight him with her gayety and keep him laughing with her shrewd nonsense. But it would all be for too brief an interval. Mary would begin to visit, and history would repeat itself.

Maggie had been a quiet, demure girl, pretty and sweet, the comfort of her father's heart, the puzzle of her mother's life.

"How the divil, Timmy, do I be havin' a child like Maggie, now?" she would inquire.

And for this Timmy had had an invariable answer:

"Hins do be hatchin' ducks, 'times, they say."

When she had been eighteen, Maggie had announced her intention of marrying Joe Lorenzini, a handsome Portuguese youth whose father had a livery stable on Folsom Street.

Her father had pleaded with her; her mother had sworn and argued.

"For the love of the Blessed Virgin, Maggie, would ye be tellin' me what ye are stuck on a Portgee for?" she had inquired. "He ain't worth the skin of a cold potato. He'll be livin' off yer soon. I know his 'kind. He'll be runnin' after the girls, too, before ye've lost the shine off yer weddin' ring."

Maggie had been plucked from the streets by Father Regan of St. Patrick's and sent to the parish school, from which she had emerged bedecked with medals for every grace of intelligence, faith, and conduct known to the heart of man.

Nevertheless, Joe Lorenzini had won her affections and she had been obdurate.

When Joe's father had been approached on the subject, he had said:

"Well, Joe, he ain't so bad. He don't work very good, but, you see, he wants to marry her, now. Very bad boys don't want the priest to tie 'em up. Maybe she'll have to work hard—I don't know. Anyway, Joe wants to marry her in the church, and if she ever has a baby, she's got a husband. Lots of girls ain't. You better let her marry my Joe if she wants to."

The Lorenzini logic had prevailed, and Father Regan had tied Joe up, hard and fast, as to marriage lines.

It had all run true to the form predicted.

At the end of the first year, Maggie had had a beautiful black-eyed baby, after which she had taken in washing to support herself, her baby, and, most of the time, Joe. He had never been unamiable or impolite—in fact, he had made himself quite charming when he had been at home—but his slender earnings as an itinerant expressman had generally been expended on his own amusements or on gayer ladies than Maggie.

Maggie and her mother had never been vividly interested in each other, and after the former's marriage, they had drifted even farther apart, although Timmy had spent most of his spare time with his daughter, who had lived in the flat below her parents, and his grandchild had been the light of his eyes.

When Mary had begun to drink, Maggie had been grieved, but, with the bitter philosophy of her kind, had accepted it calmly. About the same time, Joe had departed for parts unknown with a bouncing Portuguese lass, and had never been heard of again, which had rather lightened Maggie's burdens.

Old Timmy had been killed in a street-car accident when little Rose had been ten years old, to the genuine sorrow of his entire family. Mary had had a check for five hundred dollars from the railway company, by way of

compensation. Of this, she had spent two hundred on a lot in the cemetery and a tombstone, and twenty-five more for prayers and candles for the repose of Timmy's soul.

Then, to drown her grief, she had begun to get very drunk. In her first burst of inebriation, she had given Maggie a hundred dollars, and the rest she had most lavishly and joyously "blown," landing in jail for the first time, but leaving a trail of celebration that had won lasting fame for her.

Big Jim Duffy had been away on his annual vacation; the new officer on the beat had been a stranger to her; and, in any case, there had been no Timmy to see her through her drunken belligerency.

Thirty days she had got, a light sentence, because she had been new in the police courts, although she had severely beaten the meek little German woman who had refused her credit for a bottle of whisky and had asked her to leave the grocery store.

Other white-haired old women, of many nationalities, had been temporary sojourners in the county jail at the same time, and Mary had found it not half bad there, despite the discipline and the lack of freedom and of drink. Congenial society, a clean bunk, fresh air, kindly, if informal treatment, and an abundance of good, plain food, had kept her contented, and the ills that might have afflicted another, more sensitively constituted and trained, had failed to register with Mary.

So, for seven years, Mrs. Maguire had lived most of her time in jail, and had noted with pride and joy the many improvements there.

On this, the occasion of her most recent release, she found her daughter busily engaged over the washtub. Rose, seventeen and pretty, was ironing in the next room.

"Well, here I am again," announced

Mrs. Maguire, with a grin of welcome to herself.

"I thought it was about time we were seeing you again," said Maggie, affably enough, going on with her scrubbing. But Rosie stopped to give the old woman an affectionate hug and say:

"It's granny! Lookin' grand, too. And see the flowers she's brought me!"

"That's like yer cheek!" said her grandmother, with a delighted chuckle. "Always takin' things for yerself, ye greedy piece!"

"She's taken something fine for herself this time, sure," said her mother, proudly and significantly.

"And what's that?" demanded Mrs. Maguire.

"It's Larry Dolan, granny, that's what!" declared Rosie, with blushing pride. "It's us to St. Patrick's for the big splice."

"Larry Dolan! Well, now, the saints be praised!" said her grandmother, with all the enthusiasm that the most ardent could ask. "Sure, that's a grand match, Rosie dear!"

"That shows what comes of bringing a girl up straight and not leaving her run the streets till all times," declared Mrs. Lorenzini, pausing a moment. "Here's Larry, a fine man with a good business—growing ev'ry day, too—crazy to marry my Rosie. And some of these mothers round here with their girls in awful mix-ups."

"And maybe you think we ain't a pair of nuts over each other! Gee, granny," said Rosie, "won't it be swell? Larry's going to do up the flat over the shop all new, and whenever I want to, Larry says, we can go out and eat our supper at any of the joints that get meat off of him."

"'Tis fine," Mrs. Maguire assured her. "See you get him quick, so nothin' happens."

"I'm not afraid," Rose declared. "I guess I know how to manage him. And I'm trying to get me some new duds

before. I hate not looking pretty classy when the time comes."

"Rosie, if that ironing's done, you better take Mrs. Cohen's wash home to her. 'Tis a big one, too. Do you think you can take it along alone?" asked her mother.

"I'll help her," volunteered Mrs. Maguire. "I'll be glad to get out and see the sights a while."

So the Cohen laundry was bundled into a huge telescope basket and borne off by the united efforts of Rosie and her grandmother, the girl chattering busily, all down the street, of her plans for the future, when she married the handsome, prosperous young butcher.

Mrs. Cohen occupied the large flat over her husband's clothing store, and Mr. Cohen himself came out of his shop to say:

"Rosie, my dear, vill you go up, please. My wife is sick in her bed to-day and can't get oud to answer no bells. Zhust put der vash down in der spare room."

As they climbed the stairs, a languid voice called out:

"Vell, who is it?"

"It's me, Mrs. Cohen—Rosie, with the wash," was the answer.

"Vell, Rosie, I'm an awful sick voman to-day. I guess I ate somet'ing. So you zhust put der vash in der spare room, and I'll pay you der next time."

"I'm awful sorry, Mrs. Cohen, but my mamma'd like the money to-day, if you can," said Rosie. "She's got to pay the rent, and you know how it is, I guess."

"Oh, all right," said Mrs. Cohen amiably. "Bút, Rosie, you got to come in here and get me my purse off der dresser."

In the spare room, Mrs. Maguire looked with frank curiosity at the glory of the large brass bed, the coarse wonder of the lace curtains, the magnificence of the rose-adorned Brussels carpet, and had ventured into the hall for

a peep at the further ostentation of the parlor as Rosie returned from Mrs. Cohen's room with the money.

The girl strapped the empty basket, tore her grandmother from the contemplation of the marvelous results of a successful clothing business, and hurried home to cook the midday meal.

After dinner, Mrs. Lorenzini permitted herself a brief period of well-earned rest on the sofa in the front room, and Rosie and Mrs. Maguire were in the kitchen. Suddenly the girl shrank back from the window where she had been standing, looking down the street.

"Oh, granny!" she gasped, pointing. "Cohen and the cop! I don't know what to do!"

"What to do? What d'ye mean?" demanded her grandmother.

"Oh, what'll I do with it?" Rose murmured helplessly, running about the room. "I never thought they'd find it gone so soon! If they get me and I go up, Larry won't never marry me!"

Old Mary seized her firmly by the arm.

"Stop this bletherin' about and act sensible, for the love of God!" she commanded. "What have ye done, and what is it ye are talkin' about?"

Rosie tore the cover off the basket and pointed to a yellow fur stole lying within.

"It's that," she said, shaking like a leaf.

"It was lyin' on the chair in that Cohen flat," said Mary. "Ye don't mean to say ye stole it? Did ye *steal*?"

"I never thought they'd miss it so soon, with her in bed, and there's folks in and out all day long in that house. I wanted to look grand for Larry," the girl sobbed. "And now they'll pinch me! Oh, my God! Granny, I'll get sent up sure!"

Old Mary stood fingering the fur.

"And ye *stole*! I guess it's the Portigee in yer. And such damn' stupid

stealin'—and off a Jew, at that! Well, Rosie, I guess it's up to yer old granny to say she took it. She's a jailbird anyhow," she said, looking up with a brave little twisted smile.

"You! Oh, granny, would you?" begged Rosie. "It can't matter so much to you, 'cause Larry'd never marry me if I got sent up, and I'd die without him and all the disgrace and talk. Will you, granny?"

"I will if ye swear, by the Blessed Virgin and all the saints and all yer hopes of heaven, that ye'll never so much as steal a bent pin again, so long as ye live," said Mrs. Maguire sternly. "None of us has ever stole, and for me to go up for that is hard. Do ye swear?"

Outside, heavy footsteps were heard coming up the stairs.

"Oh, yes, on my rosary, granny, by all the saints, I swear!" said Rosie, dropping on her knees before her grandmother.

"Don't yer never let yer mother know. She thinks she's brought ye up so grand," commanded Mary, with a little bitter grin. "She knows her mother's no good, anyhow. Now ~~stop~~ lookin' like green cheese and rattlin' around here. Begin to wash them dishes, and keep yer face closed."

With a fine dramatic instinct, Mrs. Maguire began to hum a tune as she wiped the dishes that Rosie was rather hysterically washing.

Mrs. Lorenzini was roused from her slumber by a knock on the door.

"Mrs. Lorenzini, ve have come," said Cohen's voice, unctuous with insult, "to find out vat your daughter and your mother did with my wife's grand new furs I bought her yesterday. It vas a grand present I brought her, and she too sick to wear it at all, and left it in der spare room, and now it's gone, and she too sick to call me upstairs before. And now der police vill see vat can be done."

"And what has my mother and daughter got to do with your wife's furs?" demanded Maggie. "Do you think we are thieves here?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lorenzini," said Cohen, "I do. And now I want your house searched. My God, I'm a poor man, and I can't buy furs like dat to lose right away."

"Cut that out," said the policeman. "I guess I got to have a look through," he added apologetically to Mrs. Lorenzini.

So into the kitchen they went, and Cohen darted at once to the basket.

"Into der basket, it went, I bet," he said, lifting the cover; then, with a veritable scream of triumph, "You see, here it is! You see! It was taken from my flat by dese vimen, and I demand der arrest. Dese two."

Old Mary looked at Cohen contemptuously.

"I'll thank ye to leave my granddaughter's name out of this. 'Tis an awful lot of fuss ye are makin' about them rotten yellow catskins, anyhow."

"Catskins! Do you hear her?" wailed Cohen. "Catskins! And if you knew vat I paid for it at auction—at auction, mind you! Feel it, please!" he besought the officer. "Zhust feel it, and say catskins if you can! Red fox, it is—der real red fox, brought in by some friends of mine midoud duty, so I know."

"Red fox, is it?" laughed Mary. "I only swiped it off ye because I thought I could hock it for the price of a drink or two and no more."

"Your granddaughter did not help you in any way, did she?" inquired the officer.

"Do I look as though I was needin' help to lift a bit of a thing like that?" inquired Mrs. Maguire, with superb scorn. "When she went in to get the money off that fat Jew woman, I just tucked the old fur into the basket,

where ye found it, never thinkin' there'd be all this pother about it."

"Well, I'll have to take you along," he said, "and both the Lorenzini's are freed of the charge."

"If she is der only von vat took it, I am sadisfied," agreed Cohen. "And, vat is more, I am sorry for Mrs. Lorenzini and little Rosie, and if der old woman is kept in jail, vere she belongs, dey can come down dis afternoon and get der next vash. Dere is no von to do it cheaper or better," he added, with a smile at Rosie that made Mrs. Maguire's fists double involuntarily.

At the nearest police station, Boggs, at the desk, greeted Mrs. Maguire cheerily:

"Hello, Mary, drunk again? We haven't seen you for a long time."

"No, I'm sober," said Mary dryly.

The old woman had faded suddenly; she looked aged, withered, and all her laughter was gone.

"What's the charge?" Boggs asked, in surprise.

"Stealing," answered the arresting officer. "On the complaint of Isadore Cohen."

"That's new for you, Mary," said the other, as he made the entry in his huge book of crime. "I never knew you to steal before."

"Have ye seen what tempted me?" asked Mrs. Maguire, with a sarcastic grin at Cohen. "Wait till ye see the red dog—or was it fox, ye said, Mr. Cohen?—that I swiped."

When Police Judge Roberts entered his courtroom the next morning and saw Mary among the prisoners, he paused to say jovially:

"Oh, Mrs. Maguire, with us again? Had a good celebration?"

Old Mary sank lower in her chair and, without looking up, said:

"No, judge, 'tis not the drink, this time."

"Not drunk?" he said with astonish-

ment. "Then what are you doing here?"

"I—I'm booked for stealin', judge," she answered.

"Bring that case up at once," directed the judge. "Now, what does this mean, Mary? I've known you a good many years, and though you may have your failings, there has never been a more honest person brought before me. Who charges you with theft?"

Cohen was ready with his lawyer, and when the question was asked, he stepped forward.

"It's me, judge, charging her," he said, with an explanatory wave of his hands. "She come vith her granddaughter to bring der vash home, and afterwards my vife's new furs—fine furs, judge——"

"Keep him quiet," the judge interrupted, and the bailiff tapped Cohen on the shoulder for silence. "Now, Mrs. Maguire, will you come over here by me? I'll see what you have to tell me."

So, close to the judge's side, out of earshot of the courtroom throng, old Mary stood and made her confession:

"'Twas this way, judge. I got out yesterday mornin', and I went to me daughter's home, and I was crazy for a drop—havin' been in for ninety this time. And when I helped Rosie, me granddaughter, take the wash home to that Jew's house, I lifted some yellow fur off of them to hock for the price of a jag. And he got wise too soon, judge, and came with a cop. They found the fur thing there, got me with the goods, and run me in. And, judge dear, for the love of the saints, stop the yappin' of that Jew, for he's drove me half out of me mind with his racket!"

"He won't be allowed to say another word, Mary," promised the judge. "You say you helped your granddaughter take the laundry home. How old is she, Mary?"

Mrs. Maguire gave him a quick, shrewd glance, but he seemed free from suspicion, and she said:

"Seventeen, your honor."

"Pretty?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Maguire uneasily.

"Got many beaus?" he continued.

"Yes, she's to be married soon to Larry Dolan, a grand young butcher. But what are ye askin' about Rosie for, judge? The child was in gettin' the money for the wash off the old Jew slob when I hooked the fur."

"Are you sure you plead guilty, Mary?" asked the judge.

"Yes, sure I do, and ye can't prove anythin' else, so let me be sent up. And I think, if ye could give me as much as ninety on it, I might as well have it. Ye see, I'm gettin' old, and don't like this movin' all the time. Mrs. Grigsby, out there, is grand to me, and I have me little garden, your honor, and maybe 'tis better for Rosie and Maggie, havin' me safe away for a long time," she said sadly. "And thank ye for all ye've done for me all these years, judge."

"I can give you six months for this, Mary, if you want it," said the judge. "But it is a thing I hate to do, having my suspicions as to the case, too."

"'Tis better so," Mary hastened to assure him. "Goin' up for somethin' new is a little hard, of course. And it seems so coldlike, judge, goin' up stiff sober this way. They needn't to know, out there, what I'm in for this time. Only, sober as I am, they'll know 'twas never for the drink. Ah, well, 'tis all in a lifetime!"

"Wait a minute," he said. Then, turning, he said loudly, in his most judicial tones:

"Mary Maguire, charged with stealing, pleads guilty. Six months in the county jail. Call the next case." Then, stepping down from the throne of justice, he said: "Follow me, Mrs. Maguire." And to the bailiff: "I will be

responsible for this prisoner until the van goes out. She'll be in my chambers."

Into his comfortable rooms the judge took Mary, asked her to sit down in his huge padded leather chair, and from the drawer of his desk drew a full bottle.

"Mary," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "do you think that this much red liquor will rouse the fight in you? I can't have you on the warpath in here, but I can trust your judgment to give me no trouble?"

Tears streamed down the old woman's cheeks. She hid her face on the great arm of the chair, and her little body shook with sobs.

"There, there, Mary!" comforted the judge, patting her shoulders. "Don't cry. I know you're one of God's own, if you do spend most of your life in jail. Cheer up now and get something in you to hearten you a bit. You can have an hour or so here and make yourself happy."

"God take care of you, judge!" sobbed Mary. "God be good to you for your grand heart!"

When the bailiff told the judge that the sheriff's van was waiting for the prisoners for the county jail, his honor looked cautiously into his chambers.

There sat old Mary, her bonnet over one eye, a happy smile on her face, crooning and chuckling to herself in the sunshine.

"Mrs. Maguire, madam, your auto is waiting for you," he announced.

She rose with a bow and a beaming smile and said:

"Judge, darlin', I'm that happy! I'm most elegantly stewed."

The bailiff who had come to get her gave one look around and then turned to the judge.

"Your honor, may I say one thing? I don't believe there's a power on earth could keep me from voting for such a grand gentleman as you are."

"Thank you, Downey," said the judge. "But be discreet about repeating anything of this little episode. It would cost me several votes, you know, if the right people got hold of it."

Downstairs, Jim Gavigan and his automobile waited in the prison yard. He hailed Mary with joy:

"Well, well, Mrs. Maguire! Going out with me again, are you? You seem to be fond of auto trips." Then, as she climbed in, "Shall I drop you at Minna Street?"

But Mrs. Maguire leaned forward and said, with hauteur:

"Home, James."



MANY a hard heart lies behind a soft glance.



TROUBLES may be blessings in disguise, but they do not always unmask.



The Woman Who Broke the Rule

By May Edginton

Author of "He That Is Without Sin," "Happiness Ever After," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Tina Laurie and her friend, Marguerite Allen, with whom she shares an apartment, are employed as models at Silver's, a photographer's shop in London. Marguerite, cynical and pleasure loving, does not hesitate to accept the attentions of the men with whom she comes in contact, but Tina, though half envious of her friend's experiences, has never tried to emulate them. On a week-end trip to visit her parents in the country, Tina has a brief conversation on the train with a man who is evidently strongly attracted to her and to whom she is as strongly attracted. He succeeds in finding out where she is employed. Upon her return, Tina, in a fit of rebellion against the drabness of her life, accepts the invitation of a wealthy newspaper man, Merchant, an old admirer of Marguerite's, to spend the week-end motoring with him. She sets out childishly delighted with the handsome fur coat he has bought her; she returns the next day sick with disgust. Marguerite's malicious enjoyment of the situation does not add to her peace of mind. In an effort to set things right, she accepts an offer of marriage from Addlebourne, an assistant at Silver's, but her honesty leads her to confess the episode with Merchant, and Addlebourne withdraws his offer. Shortly afterward, Stranger, the man of the train, appears at Silver's, ostensibly to have his picture taken, but very evidently to see Tina. He asks her to go motoring with him, and she accepts. In spite of Marguerite's cynicism, she is sure that he is not the kind of man to take advantage of her. On the trip, he suddenly asks her to kiss him, but when she shrinks away in horror, he seems pleased. He begs her forgiveness, and tells her that some day he will explain why he made the request. Then he takes her to the country place that he has recently bought, and asks her advice as to its furnishings. When they return from their tour of the house, Tina's fur coat, which she had left near the fire, is found a mass of charred cinders on the hearth. Stranger insists upon replacing it. Shortly afterward, the sudden death of Tina's parents leaves her in possession of a small income, enough to live upon comfortably. She stays on in the flat with Marguerite, and, in her new leisure, she sees a good deal of another of Marguerite's admirers, Reggie Ferriss, as well as of Stranger. She and Marguerite decide to give a little dinner, inviting only the four men they know best—Stranger, Ferriss, Addlebourne, and Silver. Silver is captivated by Tina in her new rôle, and stays after the others leave, with the obvious intention of seeing her alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

SILVER spoke first, but that was not until some minutes had gone.

His large, inexpressive face had melted into wonderful gentleness, and unusual meditation seemed to hold him hesitating on the threshold of some new thing, although he gave no impression of doubt as to the ultimate crossing of that Rubicon.

"Miss Laurie," he said, "my dear—let me take the opportunity while I've got it—you know I admire you very much? I think I admire you more than any girl I've ever seen. From the first time you came to us, you—you hit me hard. Really, I mean it. Really."

"Mr. Silver!" Tina stammered. "Don't!"

"Oh," he exclaimed with an earnest-

ness that dispelled her fleeting anticipation of promiscuous love-making, "don't mistake me. I love you. Tina, I love you. Really and truly, Tina. I want to ask you—will you marry me?"

The question came like a wave from the sea of all the life force in the world, knocking Tina fairly and squarely, rushing her along to some unknown shore. At the same time, the fact that it was Silver, not Ferriss and not Harden Stranger, who asked her the coveted question, proposed to her the sanctuary of the timeless goal, struck her ironically as rather funny, rather a jest, had it not been sad. But wisdom that was also timeless invaded Tina as she sat there looking at the urgent man, and told her that thousands, that millions, of women had to take second best; had to like what they got, rather than get what they liked; settled down in the homes that thousands and millions of such urgent men had provided, and found them sweet.

In those few crowded moments that the silence lasted after Silver's question, she tried to think: "What is he really like? Will it matter so much if he is twice my age, since my age is not very great? Wouldn't this, the shortest cut from loneliness, be best? If one said, 'No,' mightn't one, after all, be giving up reality for a dream? Supposing neither Ferriss nor Harden—she thought of him thus—cares, isn't this the best way? Or isn't it as good a way as most girls find?"

"I know," Silver was saying, leaning forward in his chair, with his clasped hands hanging between his knees and the white knuckles showing the tension to which even a man of calm, collected habit can quickly be wrought, "that there are various points for you to think over. You don't know much about me, after all, do you, my dear? I'm a sealed book to you as far as my private life's concerned. Well, my private life's simple; you might think it

astonishingly simple. There's my house at Richmond, a little house, but cozy, Tina, very cozy, and anything you want altered could be altered. There's a nice garden, where—would you be surprised to hear?—I work most of my week-ends. I'm a great gardener."

With a modest sort of pride he stated it, and suddenly the listening girl could picture him in a rôle of quite suburban simplicity.

"At the bottom of my garden I've a boathouse where I keep my own punt. Well, you know, I've often taken one of you girls out." He paused; then: "I say 'one' of you girls. Well, it was never you, was it? There's something different, you know, about you—yes, decidedly different. I don't know if you'd be bored with housekeeping, and if you were, it wouldn't matter. There's my housekeeper, who's been with me for years and years, and she'd run the show for you. And a maid. Of course, you'd have every comfort, my dear. And I keep my little car down there, and you could learn to drive, and run about as much as you liked."

Silver paused.

"I'm older than you, a good deal, I know, but in these days we're all so modern, eh, young and old? So it doesn't matter so much. Eh, Tina? What do you say, dear?"

"I say—I say——"

She hardly knew what to say, and never had her desirability been greater in his eyes. These hours of seeing his little lovely model at home, prettier than ever and confident in her new freedom, had confirmed him in a feeling that he had hardly known he entertained. But now he knew, and he thought to himself:

"I've found a pure pearl."

Reaching for her hand, he went on pleading:

"Try to like me, Tina! There's no one else, is there? Tell me there's no one else!"

The evening's meeting, with the possible rivalry of two younger men above his own world, had quickened him into action, and he pleaded harder:

"Do tell me, darling! Do tell me!"

"If I'm to tell you, I must have time to think."

"And if I'm to know to-night, there's only about ten minutes by the clock."

Tina tried to think, confused by the running talk that Silver seemed unable to help keeping up intermittently. Already he looked happy, as if in anticipation of what he was to hear. He said:

"You know, my dear, I've never married. There were times—years ago—when I thought I'd like to. The something—or—other sort of gripped me—I mean the feeling that makes a young man think he wants to found something. It's race instinct, of course. But when I looked for a girl, I never saw one I wanted to spend more than an evening with or perhaps a week-end, you know, Tina—for I'm not going to deceive you—and a very short week-end at that.

"You're not the sort of girl who ought to be deceived—in fact, I don't know at all what sort of a girl you are. I think you're unique. Anyway, you're priceless. I've never met any one in the very least like you. I believe there used to be such women, but for a generation or two they've fast been becoming extinct. I always used to feel that if I couldn't marry a girl who was true blue, straight all through, marriage wasn't worth while at all. After all, why marry a woman of—the other sort? We men, you know, Tina, we're not too perfect ourselves, and I dare say women think we haven't much right to expect perfection from them, but—well, we do expect it, and are very shy of marrying if we're not to get it. I dare say we're illogical; women say so. I dare say we're vain——"

She thought, while he was speaking:

"Oh, is it all to happen over again? I'll have to tell him—or—could I not tell him? Supposing we married and he found out?"

She said, with her eyes on the clock, whose minute hand seemed to be traveling as fast as her own heartbeats:

"Why are you thinking me so different from so many other girls?"

"Why, Tina——" Silver began.

She continued with a steadfastness surprising even to herself, for the conflict with Addlebourne had given her an amazing strength to bear punishment:

"I've led a life full of the same temptations, you know. I've been just as hungry—if you're silly, you can be hungry in London on two pounds a week—I'm just as fond of clothes and amusements and—and everything else."

"Why, Tina," said Silver very quietly.

She was not looking at him or she would have seen his jaw drop and his eyes, narrowing to pin points, fix themselves on hers.

"You say women think men illogical and vain. Well, perhaps we do. You expect a lot. You expect—you expect—you expect a girl——"

"Tina——" Silver began again.

"You expect a girl to keep—what you said—perfect, if any of you is to marry her. But all the same you all come round her, offering dinner when she's hungry, and a play when she's tired with monotony and dullness, and sea air when she's pining for a breath of it in some beastly little stuffy room in London. I—I've had it all offered to me."

"I've no doubt," said Silver very quietly. "But, Tina——"

"There's no 'but.' I've taken it."

A dull and angry red suffused Silver's face, yet still his voice had that extreme quiet. Jealousy, swift and fierce, lit fire in his eyes.

"It's easy," he said, leaning back ab-

ruptly, "to make mistakes over meanings when people speak in half words or parables, and one should try to avoid such mistakes."

"I don't want half words," said Tina in her strength. "I want you to know—because such secrets are dangerous between married people—that only a little while ago I was away with—*with* Mr. Merchant."

Silver asked, quieter than ever:

"Week-end, I suppose? Car? S-s-sea, I s-s-suppose?" stuttering just a little over the last syllables.

The new, sad, wise Tina answered:

"How well you guess! How well you must know!"

Unheeding the bitterness of the retaliation that she could not forego, he rose and stood, his brow overcast and his clenched hands in his trousers pockets.

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "The damned beast!"

A trembling seized Tina, so that she could not rise, too. She looked up at him from her chair.

"Why?" she uttered. "You mentioned such incidents in your own life. Are you a scoundrel? Are you a damned beast?"

"It's different!" he exclaimed. "For you—with you—it's different!"

From her new wisdom Tina replied as jadedly as Marguerite might have done:

"It always is."

He paused, struck by the jadedness. It was not a pretty trait in so young a girl and it told—he thought it told—tales. His feelings were curious—not anger, not reproach, not only disappointment, not only aggrievement with fate, but something nearer resignation. He thought:

"Of course I've been a fool. I've been mad to imagine—"

He saw again the world of women as it had for long—since, in fact, those past days of credulous youth—ap-

peared to him; in which world women were light trifles, amusements, pet animals, demons, thieves, but not angels. The momentary vision of angels vanished.

Silver smiled kindly, tolerantly.

"Life's hard," he said, "isn't it? I know. Don't think I don't understand. You look as if you were fretting about it too much, and you shouldn't. Don't take these things too seriously. Try to forget them, and enjoy all you can. That's a sound scheme, Tina—the soundest that ever was."

"In view of what you—were saying just now—"

He looked toward the door, frowning a little. He had learned many lessons in his forty-odd years, of which the best learned—and the stupidest—was not to believe. Therefore, he did not believe that the episode to which she had falteringly confessed was the only one that she needed to forget; he knew all about women's evasions, misrepresentations, and half truths.

"In view of that," he said lightly, "in view of that—oh—ah—in view of that—I'll write to you, shall I, my dear? You and I'll be very good friends, I'm sure. And don't mind having told me. You're a jolly honest child. I'm the soul of discretion, you know; rely upon that. May I get my hat and coat?"

Mechanically Tina preceded him into the narrow hall, where she watched him fit on the garment with an effect of dandyism sedulously assumed to fob off the heavier emotions breathing in the air; mechanically, also, she held out her cold hand in farewell.

"It's been charming of you to give me this nice supper," he said. "I like your little place. You girls are snug. The modern young woman knows how to take care of herself, eh? Good-by, my dear. You'll be friends with me, won't you?"

He left her half in doubt as to his

ultimate meaning, while he put an arm around her very kindly, patted her shoulder, and, with a "You'll let me this once, won't you?" kissed her unresponsive cheek.

"Make my adieu and thanks to Margie," he called out as he stood in the doorway. His teeth gleamed in the smile she knew so well; the familiar mask was replaced upon his sleek countenance; the new Silver was lost and the old Silver stood in his shoes again. Tina turned away almost before he had closed the door upon himself and, retreating to the sitting room, stood and struck her hands together.

She wondered, in a red agony of humiliation:

"What does he mean? Has—*it*—altered everything he said? What do men really think of—*it*? Why should we be judged so hardly? When will he write?"

Tina did not know that she stood there aghest for quite five minutes, while Marguerite dealt noisily with the crockery in the kitchen. It was not the clash of china that roused her from her trance, but a far tinier sound, the clicking sound of the letter flap in the front door.

She darted out and found upon the floor a folded piece of paper, torn, evidently, from a small pocketbook and addressed upon the outside to "Tina;" but quick as her movements were, she was too late to hear upon the stone stairs without Silver's feet running down.

Silver had kept his word; already he had written, standing on the stone stairs beneath the flaring gaslight on the landing. His method—not a bad or a merciless one, either—was always to clear up a dubious matter, or put an end to an awkward contretemps with a woman, with lightning dispatch.

She read:

DEAR LITTLE TINA: We'll consider all that's said unsaid. I appreciate all that you

were going to say [artfully he handed back to her a broken key to self-respect] and will take my refusal as spoken. I know all about it, and so, of course, do you. You little joy girls aren't made for wives; the rôle wouldn't suit you. It would pall, and rightly you fear that it would. Now I don't think you should have given an old man champagne cup and caused him to ask foolish questions, because he also, in his sanity, is perfectly sure that the rôle of husband wouldn't really suit Yours,

CHARLEY SILVER.

These words, faintly written in pencil, impressed themselves with a dead blackness upon Tina's sight. Furiously she tossed the scrap of paper to the dying fire, and furiously watched it burn. She went to the kitchen, flung open the door, and stood looking upon Marguerite.

"Well?" said Marguerite.

"Well?" replied Tina.

But it was later, in the darkness, from her pillow, that she gave her confidence to the other girl, as, in the darkness, from her pillow, she often did.

"Marg'rite, Silver asked me to marry him. And I wanted to be straight, because—I don't care what you say—secrets are dangerous between married people; so I told him. And then, though I would have married him, he wouldn't marry me. He has the standard, like other men, you see."

"You shouldn't have told him," said Marguerite, "for he's easy to manage, and he has a decent house at Richmond and a car and a punt and a lovely garden; and he must clear at least two thousand a year. Haven't I told you women daren't be honest? If you want all that, you've got to steal it."

CHAPTER XIV.

Harden Stranger seemed often out of town on business through that summer; and when he was in town, he seemed to transact much business, too, so that the time he could snatch for

flying visits to the King's Road flat and the opportunities he could make for returning this hospitality by restaurant lunches, or, perhaps, a run in his car, were brief and seldom compared with the time and opportunities to be seized by an idler like Ferriss.

All his summers Ferriss spent in town, his autumns on his shoot in Yorkshire, his winters in sleighing and skiing among the Alps, his springs wandering from Nice to Cannes, from Cannes to Monte Carlo, in the train of his mother or other female relatives who took advantage of his idleness to demand his attendance.

That summer, then, his attendance upon Tina was frequent and prolonged. It ripened into an intimacy while yet Stranger remained half in his shell of reticence. Sometimes it included Marguerite, but on such occasions invariably a friend of Ferriss' could be found to pay court to the dark beauty, so that the *partie carrée* resolved itself to all effect into two pairs, neither of whom need pay more than a transient regard to the other.

Ferriss took Tina often, during the long, hot days while Marguerite worked at Silver's, upon the river.

It was upon the river, the boat drawn up under the overhanging branches of a tree upon the bank, in the weekday seclusion of a backwater, that he asked her to marry him, and that she told him, haltingly and fearfully, what she had told Addlebourne and Silver.

Ferriss was very sorry. He was more than sorry—cut to the heart, bewildered and despairing. She could not bring herself, after the stumbling words were out, to enter into long affirmations of rectitude before and since that horrible time; neither would the young man press for such.

Possibly, had they been made, it could not have altered his astounded mind. Possibly, had they been made, he, like Silver, could not have believed,

He, like Silver, knew the half truths of the half world, had learned the stupid book of disbelief. Not that he would for a moment have placed Tina in the half world, but—

Ferriss was a young man of family tradition; he had looked forward to some fight with his mother over a marriage with Tina as he supposed her to be. Over a marriage with Tina as she confessed herself to be, he would have had to fight himself.

He spoke, rather incoherently, of records of honor; of a man's duty to keep the strain untarnished. He tried to choose the happiest words to clothe his difficulty, but all were unfortunate.

He rowed her back; he was very kind, and would not let her be hurried home. They had a horrible tea, mocked with pretty, gay waitresses and strawberries and cream, at a riverside place, before he put her in a taxi, paid the estimated fare, and said good-by.

"If you don't mind, I won't come. I have an appointment," he lied tritely.

Tina drove home in her black-and-white-striped river frock and her black river hat which she had bought so gayly, and told Marguerite, because, once again, she must tell some one.

Marguerite was tired of another woman's woes, another woman's lovers. Once more she condemned Tina's foolishness; once more she recited her little flippant rules of life; but she had no sympathy to give. Moreover, Tina had removed Ferriss, now, from their ken, and Ferriss had been a young man whose friendship, before Tina's unconscious intervention, had been worth while; who was unquestionably of the right sort, with a frequently full purse, pretty manners, and the most exquisite experience in lunching, dining, and generally entertaining a woman grown to fastidiousness in such matters, even if she could not afford to exercise it.

So Tina found her wail unanswered.

The empty, workless days began to

pall a little. She could have gone back to Silver's, choosing her own convenience, just for the sittings, but she would not face him. Often he sent her messages through Marguerite, suggesting a new pose, but she would hear none of it. She used to go out by herself—to the shops, to a picture gallery or a *matinée*; and taking money therefor from the plenty in her purse, would look at the stupid, insensate symbol and hate it blindly for that it could buy, not only a mortal life, but the life's owner, the deathless soul.

"Yet," she said, "it is salvation, too. Had I only possessed it a week, one little week, before I did, it would have saved me."

Marguerite used to say, whenever imps of temper goaded her—and that was often, for the days were warm and weary:

"You see? You should have married Silver or Ferriss. Addlebourne was too poor, anyway, and he's mediocre; he's born to be a nobody. But Silver or Reggie— Oh, you fool, to give yourself away! You should have married one of 'em, never mind which; for, see, your Harden's left you. He's found other occupations, other attractions. I told you, didn't I, that he meant nothing? Now you see? Now you believe me? Oh, God, what a fool!"

Unexpectedly one day, with the suddenness of a miracle, Stranger came. On a fine, hot morning, about eleven o'clock, when Marguerite had left for Silver's two hours before, while Tina was occupying herself perfunctorily in something housewifely, which seemed to her the only solid reason left for continued existence, his long brown car drew up, tooting musically, outside the block, and Stranger himself, long and brown, too, ran up the many stone stairs to the familiar door.

Tina opened it to him, and found

himself all at once, in one incomprehensible, flying moment, at peace.

CHAPTER XV.

He came in, saying:

"Well, little Tina, how are you? Can I carry you off this minute for an unspecified time? The car's outside."

Upon enchanted feet she ran to put on a little hat with a long veil, a coat, her most beautiful shoes, her freshest gloves; all in a breathless hurry of peculiar exquisiteness.

Left in the artistically gaudy room which he had always loathed, Stranger looked around it and drew a long sigh of distaste. It seemed to him to typify the life that he hated to see women live, the careless, free, yet not happy, spinsterhood, proceeding without aims and without laws, and reckless of eternity.

Tina returned, and said simply, with bright eyes:

"I'm ready."

A glorious run, with swooping bursts of speed, took them down through the wooded hills of Bucks into Oxfordshire, to the small gray village set under a green hill and up a cherry-tree avenue to Cherry Hall. The garden now was rich with roses; the paths were rolled smooth and hard; the lawns were shaved; every tree was in full green; and a red setter, magnificent in the sun, walked down the steps of the house, as if, most gracefully, to receive the guests.

"Do you like it?" Stranger asked.

"Yes," said Tina.

Up in the same chintz bedroom, tucking back the escaped strands of hair under her little hat, prinking in the mirror, she was happy. She wished to stay down here forever; to leave behind her the memory-haunted flat, her old self, and Marguerite. But although she wished to stay here forever, she cherished no hope, so humble had men

made her, and she did not dare analyze to herself Stranger's motives, thoughts, wishes, in driving her a second time to the home he was establishing. She strengthened herself to think there was nothing behind his words when he said, at lunch:

"I want you to see all your suggestions completed, Tina. Everything that you advised has been done."

They lunched in the brown dining room of Tina's scheming, and afterward inspected the green library, the long drawing-room with its pale French colors, the big conservatories, the ragged robins growing high in the erstwhile daffodil glade. They saw everything that was to be seen before Stranger offered her a white wicker chair beneath the giant beech on the central lawn, took another himself, and said in a low voice:

"Tina, now everything that you like has been done, do you—would you—care to have it?"

She passed through a moment of ecstasy and terror; she did not know that she had closed her eyes at the mere contemplation, and she opened them again to see Stranger looking at her with love and passion roused in his face.

At her wonderful, wistful gaze, he smiled, his hand stole over the arm of her chair to find her hand, and he added:

"You'd have to take me with it, Tina, of course."

So far behind her old life seemed to fall, as she sat under the beech tree on this summer afternoon, so protective seemed the high gray walls and the yew hedges closing her into this secure peace, that the bar to happiness seemed less sinister, and her secret, told and received three times before to such humiliation of spirit, became of less magnitude. The future was upon her like a full tide of glory. Already she was mistress of this house, those trees

and flowers and long green levels; already she seemed to have passed the stage of mere acquaintance with the place, and to be fixed in it safely forever; already she was Stranger's wife, with her garden doors shut upon all people out of the past. Tina knew, then, the misery of this long summer, the ache of waiting, the fears of uncertainty, the resignation to second, third, fourth best, as those who have emerged from strain can look back and see things, a while chaotic, in true perspective.

"You could marry me, dear?" Stranger was saying.

She began to answer, but the answer tripped and fell upon her tongue. The bar began to thicken; the cord tightened; the past looked over the garden walls. Leaving her hand in her lover's, but turning her face away, Tina asked herself:

"If I told him?"

Stranger said:

"What is it, you dear girl? I don't want to hurry you, for to a woman, even more than to a man, a wedding is a very grave affair. But I thought perhaps you would have known—guessed—all about it, long ago, and though I was terribly uncertain of you—and am still while you sit with your little face looking so aloof like that—I put off asking you till you should have got used to the idea and thought it over—thought me over. Oh, Tina, haven't you known? Haven't you thought me over? And if you have, don't keep me waiting to know, there's a darling! I've not surprised you?"

"Not altogether," Tina murmured. "But give me—just a little time."

"As long as you like," he cried, in a low voice, with triumph in his face, for he guessed that when a woman postpones love with the futile plea, "Give me time," it is long odds against her wanting such time for other purpose than to dream of love, to enjoy

the slow making of the inevitable decision.

"But," he whispered, "don't let it be too long! And there's only one possible answer, isn't there, darling? Just tell me that, and I'll be as happy as a god!"

"It would be telling too much—yet," Tina fluttered weakly. "A day—a week — I want quite, *quite* a week."

"Very well," said Stranger. "I've waited; I can wait more. Tell me one thing, though—tell me you're happy."

Although such admission must give the deferred promise he sought for, must seal his triumph, Tina murmured:

"I'm happy; I'm *awfully* happy," while all around them the quiet, hot garden whispered of bliss, and the blazing afternoon was fragrant as the air of heaven.

He kissed the hand he held, and they sat silent and entranced. They knew, as surely as man and woman can know, that they played enchantingly, no more than feigning indecisions, before the fire of marriage.

Soon, across the lawn, a maid appeared; she was not definitely smiling, but she wore the indefinable woman look of enjoyment and congratulation that her circumstances forbade her to speak. With this delighted and secret air, she unfolded the table she carried, spread the embroidered cloth, and went, after a romantic glance at Tina, back for her laden tray. She was a country girl, healthy, good-tempered, and simple, with a boundless admiration for the Londoner's cachet, in dress, in bearing, in manner and speech. All the time of her serving, she bore toward Tina an air of admiring homage, of approving respect, that incorporated the fair, frail newcomer with the gray house, the beech tree, and the velvet lawns. From the windows, they guessed—though they did not look—that the maid watched them discreetly,

finding a pleasure in their handsome personalities, in the clear writing of their story.

Once again Tina poured tea for Stranger in his own domain, and this time a new and wonderful familiarity was in her handling of the task. The beautiful hour lingered on unspoiled by questions, for blindly, recklessly, and happily she banished the disturbing doubt that lay near the surface of her mind. Talk lagged, but love did not; love was with them, about and around, above and below them, until once more the long brown car had carried them back to London, and Tina, alone, stepped into the narrow limits of her flat.

There Marguerite sat at the scrappy meal they called dinner. There the old fears raced back to Tina. There a crazy-colored chintz cover attested: "This is the chair where Silver sat when—" There the window seat recalled: "Here Reggie Ferriss looked into your eyes one day at twilight, and you knew—" And there, at the round table with its littered furnishings, Adlebourne, with his Henry Ainley face and scornful eyes, had sat at supper, mocking, by his bitter silence, her courage of defiance.

In the face of witnesses such as these, Tina's hope wilted; terror returned without resignation; and the gray house in the garden of roses stood inaccessible and cold. But she walked in to confront the witnesses bravely, threw aside her hat, pulled off her gloves daintily, finger by finger, and chirped out:

"Hello!"

"Hello!" said Marguerite. "Had a good day? And where've you been?"

"Motoring with Mr. Stranger."

"Oh?"

Tina sat down, lying.

"I'm hungry, simply famished! Cut me some of that tongue. Thanks. It's been hot, hasn't it?"

"At Silver's it was. In a car, I suppose it wasn't."

"Oh, it's hot everywhere."

"Tell me your news."

"News? I haven't any."

"Oh, bad business," said Marguerite said to her with a cutting and savage condolence.

"I don't know what you mean."

"There's no serious intentions about your Stranger."

Tina denied or affirmed nothing.

She had no confidences for Marguerite in the darkness, later; her judgment said to her wisely, "Keep your own counsel, girl," and, for once, she kept it. She asked of herself, and of no other, "If I tell him?" and alone she answered it in the days that followed. She was learning, very slowly, the mischief of advisers; she was learning to bank upon herself alone. The week went by, and at the end of it she had told Marguerite nothing.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the seventh morning, at eight-fifteen, Tina was apprised by wire of her lover's speedy advent. The telegram read merely:

Shall come at nine-thirty. HARDEN.

But what significance thrilled through the common words! She answered the doorbell herself, in her kimono and a hastily donned negligee cap, and carrying the precious message back to the bedroom, she read and reread it before Marguerite's inquiring eyes.

But she told Marguerite nothing.

Marguerite's attitude, throughout the performance of dressing and of breakfast, was one embodied jeer. She hoped, thereby, to elicit something—anger, a hot and triumphant explanation, a cold retaliation of sarcasm like her own—but she received no satisfaction; for Tina was traveling too remotely for the other girl to follow. She was traveling into the land of all delights, where the world-weary and the mud-soiled never go.

Reluctantly Marguerite pinned on her hat at nine o'clock, lingering over the business, postponing her departure until the last minute, hoping to learn, to see, some sequel to the episode of the telegram that had rejoiced Tina's eyes and honeyed her throat so that it sang like a morning thrush about the flat. But at last Marguerite must go, and she went with a manner of mutinous contempt for Tina and her castle building. Yet she saw, before she closed the front door, that this manner impressed Tina not at all; she saw that Tina had become too happy to be hurt.

Harden came on the tick of nine-thirty, knowing Marguerite well away. Tina opened the door, too shy to speak, and before anything was said, they were in each other's arms. The week's probation had been far too long.

After that they sat together in the big chair and talked. Much glorified nonsense passed before definite things were reached and happily considered.

"When shall it be?"

"Any time."

"You're a dear darling. This month or next?"

"O-oh! Next."

"Very early next month will do, considering that the end of this month is only five days away."

"My frocks——"

"I know little girls are funny about frocks, but it's much nicer buying them after marriage than before, you know."

"We've taken this flat——"

"People never put off getting married over small questions such as unexpired tenancies."

"D-don't they?"

"No. You surrender?"

"I surrender."

"Put on your things and come out."

Tina found obedience delightful. She ran into her bedroom for her most charming hat—already she wore her most charming gown—and while she hunted for this and that trifle, Stranger

could hear her singing in little trills and snatches like a thrush. It made him smile to himself, even while his brow was dark with some thought that made his heart as primitively fierce as hearts were said to be in the Stone Age. But when she emerged, it was this fierceness that was uppermost in him, and he took her into an embrace that hurt and cried:

"Tina, you're going to marry me, and you're going to leave everything behind! Mark that, Tina. If there's anything you regret, anything you've suffered, you're to forget it. I've got you; I'll hold you tight." And he held her. "You're me, now, and I'm you. Understand, Tina, all that's ever happened in your life or mine is blotted out, and we start fresh from this day with each other. Dearest," he said, kissing her, "do you like it?"

Bewildered, she liked it very much indeed.

They went out into a London full of joy. They walked all the way to Bond Street to choose a ring, for short as the time of waiting was to be, she must not lose any of the darling paraphernalia of a girl's supremacy; and it shone, one great solitaire in a narrow band, like a star upon her finger. They lunched leisurely, exhilarated with their ownership of each other. Then, telephoning to the garage for his car, Stranger drove her out through Epsom and Esher, through wooded Surrey hills, where they perfected their beautiful plans together.

Tina did not tell Marguerite her news in words. With that great diamond beaming upon her finger, such relation would have been unnecessary. She just walked in—for she had parted, at her own request, from her lover on the landing—and found Marguerite sitting once more at the untidy repast that so often satisfies lone women's sense of congruity.

"Late again!" said Marguerite care-

lessly. "Another day's joy ride? You're lucky, aren't you?"

Tina stood by the table, peeling off her gloves very deliberately. The flush of her long drive was on her cheek, and glory lit her eyes. When her left-hand glove was removed, she rested the finger tips of the hand lightly on the table.

Marguerite took in immediately the revelation of that action, the pride of the challenge.

"I congratulate you," she said calmly: then, more insistently, "But who is he?"

Tina caught her momentary resentment back upon her lips and replied as calmly as Marguerite had given her congratulations:

"Who should it be but Harden Stranger?"

"Oh!" said Marguerite, languidly. "Well—I'm delighted. Are you dining out with him to-night?"

"No. I'm staying in."

"You'll excuse me, dear?" said Marguerite, rising. "I've finished my supper. And I've all my silk stockings to mend—positively every one has laddered." And she drifted out as nonchalantly as she had spoken.

But once in the bedroom, she sat down, clenched her hands till the knuckles were white, and looked at herself in the glass. Her heart beat fitfully and fast.

She could not have eaten with Tina, or stayed at the table to watch the girl who had won to the land of delight; it rankled in her breast like a poison, foul and destructive; it invaded the air that she must share with Tina and darkened the last ray of the sinking sun. One element only filled her, the devilish, longing wonder:

"Does he know?"

A long while Marguerite sat with her elbows planted on the table, looking remorselessly at herself in the glass, and all the while the mean orgy reveled in her breast, and the cruel spirits went

questing this way and that, as on a blood trail, crying:

"Does he know? Can he know?"

Marguerite answered them:

"I think not."

It had been a week of secrets and silences; a week during which this culmination had brewed; a week during which that fool girl, strong in her own counsel at last, had been withholding her revelations, making plot and plan, arranging, by virtue of her simple ways, her angelic face, to steal out from the world that had soiled her, with washed wings, into the other world toward which all women, knowing or unknowing, burned. The vinegar and gall of envy were drunk deep by Marguerite as she sat there clenching her hands, and with the bitter mind of the beggar who sees the millionaire drive by regardless, she longed to shatter and destroy the one wealthier than she. Rising at the sound of crockery collection in the next room, she swept back.

A certain wanness of her face, the tight drawing of her mouth, testified her strain and storm, but Tina saw in them nothing but bodily weariness, accustomed disillusion, and from her new transcendence she paused upon the path to splendor and looked down upon the tired woman of the earth.

"Marg'rite," she said, "you must go away. You've got to have a holiday this year, a real, long seaside holiday. Let me pay, Marg'rite. I'd love to."

"Thank you," the other said slowly, piling up dish upon dish with slattern hands. "Perhaps you may pay. But, first, aren't you going to tell me anything?"

"What should I tell you, Marg'rite?"

"Oh, about your adventures; about your romance; about the miracles you're going to perform, and the husband you're getting. All the old tale of success that girls like to tell."

"There's nothing to tell—really. But I do want to talk to you. I do want

to discuss things—about what we're going to do and the flat and so on. Let's just leave the dishes for the woman in the morning."

"Why, what's the hurry?"

"Well, we—we're—getting married next month."

"Are you?" said Marguerite, a real color creeping up under the false one upon her cheek bones.

"Do leave the old dishes and I'll tell you everything."

Marguerite threw herself into the armchair and put up her hands behind her head.

"What's the hurry? Are you afraid you'll lose him?"

"Don't be odious! He wanted it next month, and the house—everything's—ready."

"Oh, everything's ready, is it? He must have felt gratifyingly confident."

"You're trying to be odious, but I shan't get angry. I can't, to-night, for everything is *too* lovely. Marg'rite, listen. You remember I told you about the place when he took me down before, and how I said I'd advised a brown dining room and a green library?"

While she ran buoyantly through the catalogue of her costly whims, Marguerite's heart beat only to one tune, and her ears listened only to one tune, and her brain made ready to arrange the score. She did not hear what Tina said, but was conscious of the cessation of her voice when all details had been given completely. Then she asked, dry-voiced and smiling:

"And what was it you were going to say about the flat, dear?"

"I was going to say that, of course, I know we've taken it for ten months more, but I needn't leave you in the lurch, you see, Marg'rite. Naturally I'll pay up my share, and yours, if you'll let me, and you can have my half of the furniture. My marriage needn't inconvenience you in the slightest."

"Oh, that's good."

"I don't understand your tone. Aren't you pleased? Don't you agree?"

"Perhaps."

"Could I arrange things better, then?"

"Perhaps."

"Do speak, Marg'rite. Tell me."

"Tina, I hate giving you up."

Tina's eyes became wet and large; her mouth trembled.

"You're a dear. But, you see——"

"I don't see."

"Explain, Marg'rite."

"Don't you think you'll want a companion, while your husband's away at——whatever he does to make money to found family places in the country?"

The question came upon Tina like a thunderbolt; for a while she did not answer it save by the bare beginnings of hesitating murmurs that made Marguerite smile. To Tina, the question spelled horror, for was not Marguerite herself one of those whom she hoped to leave far behind with the past, upon whom her garden doors should be shut? As soon as she came face to face with such a question, Tina knew that, most of all, she longed to forget Marguerite when she started life afresh. By and by she repeated slowly and faintly:

"A——companion?"

Marguerite watched her, smiling, lighting a cigarette.

"I should like to come with you, dear Tina—not to be in the way and fully recognizing my position. It would be a position of delicacy, I am aware. I suggest you create a berth of companion-housekeepership for me. I suppose I should have my own rooms, and come only when I was called. Think—wouldn't it be extremely pleasant to have some one you know who could talk to you when necessary, and at the same time keep the household accounts—as well—as well"—said Marguerite slowly—"as her own counsel?"

The blood rose hot and red in Tina's

face; she felt almost suffocating. Marguerite continued:

"You know that you could rely upon me to keep my own counsel, don't you, dear? For I assume that you haven't told Mr. Stranger what you told Addlebourne and Silver and Reggie Ferriss?"

Silence answered her completely. Lightly she said:

"Then you were wise. It was my advice, wasn't it? And wasn't it good? You've snared for yourself a rich and personable husband."

"I don't know," Tina at length made answer, "that I want a companion or a housekeeper. Do you think, when people are just married, that such a person wouldn't be rather——"

"In the way? It would depend upon the person's discretion, and I am discreet."

"Marg'rite, it isn't that I don't want you——"

"Isn't it?" replied Marguerite, turning a full gaze upon Tina.

Tina did not know, even then, that the other hated her, but she did know, from some danger instinct, that she was up against a force that she feared could crush her happiness at a blow, and she dared not resist it. The menace, quite unapprehended, presented itself in its entire gravity.

Marguerite uttered, in her husky-rich voice:

"Tina dear, I couldn't leave you. I want to come, too. Don't be afraid I'll be in the way. I'm going to keep entirely to myself, but I must come, too. Can't you think how your description of your home that is to be has made me long to see it and stay in it? Now you're rich and happy, do you want quite to forget your oldest friend?"

"Supposing Harden wouldn't——"

"You'll persuade him to anything. You must say you want me, need me, that it's necessary to have me."

"Necessary?" said Tina to herself, and the danger instinct replied: "Nec-

essary indeed. Can you afford to make such an enemy? Can you afford to estrange her even a little? Isn't there something behind her request—some power to enforce it? Are you not in the hollow of her hand?"

"Ask him, my dear," said Marguerite. "Ask him. I assure you it'll be much the best thing for you in the end. Why hesitate, my dear? Don't you want me?"

Here the malice rang through the sweetness in her deep voice, clear in Tina's ears, but instantly Marguerite spread it with honey.

"Don't refuse me, there's a love! I'm lonely; I'm hard up. Haven't we been hard up together long enough for you to feel a sympathy with me? Haven't we always agreed so splendidly, Tina?"

"Marg'rite, if it's only because of money that you want to live with us, you know I have plenty of my own. Yes, yes, I do sympathize, and I shall always remember. But, Marg'rite, take some of my money. Take half——"

The devils in Marguerite's breast could have cried aloud:

"What? You'd buy yourself off? But you shan't buy yourself off, fool! You shall go, step by step, down the road that other women walk."

But Marguerite kept these devils in hand. Consumed as she was, she restrained herself to a few words, lightly spoken, but heavy as iron in the soul, and as implacable.

"I don't want your money. I'm going to stick to *you*, Tina. I'm going to stick fast—tight, I tell you. I'll never let you go."

Then she rose, laughing, and began again to gather up the supper things, while Tina sat still, watching her move to and fro, watching her face for signs, listening to her words for silken threats, burning against her impotently, learning a fear the degree of which she had never learned before.

CHAPTER XVII.

Tina was lunching with her lover the next day at the little pleasant, crowded restaurant in Heddon Street, and so, on awakening in the morning, when she was tormented by Marguerite's pillow inquiries on the subject under discussion the evening before, she promised:

"I'll ask him to-day at lunch. But supposing he says——"

"My child," Marguerite said, "I expect, and take, only one answer. Aren't you clever enough to get it?"

She asked presently, at the dressing table, from behind clouds of hair:

"Where are you lunching?" and behind her veil of hair received the answer in secret. Tina could not see her smile.

All morning the thought of Marguerite hung heavily upon Tina, but night reflections had shown her fairly and squarely the values of the position, and fairly and squarely, if with inward tremor, she had braced her mind to accept them. Thus Stranger, when he called for her at twelve, guessed nothing of her anxiety, until by her careful preparing of the ground, she made it apparent to him over their lunch table in the upper room of the full restaurant.

He asked tenderly:

"What is it, kiddie? What do you want?" and she was about to plunge into her reluctant request when an event shocked from her for the moment her power of speech.

The event was the arrival of Marguerite, escorted by Morris Merchant.

A letter, one of Marguerite's insolent, but beguiling letters, had called Merchant, for the hour only, to her feet again, and when, after receiving it at his office, he had rung her up on the telephone at the studio, she had replied as beguilingly as she had written.

"Take me out. How dare you neglect me? If you ask me to lunch to-day I'll come; but if not, never again."

And he: "Well—well—where shall I meet you, then? I might just manage it."

And Marguerite: "The restaurant in Heddon Street. But you'd better more than 'just manage it,' for I won't be hurried."

Then, seeking Silver, for whom she had instantly fallen into an attractive pose, she had pleaded:

"I want *two* hours off for lunch to-day certainly, and *three* perhaps."

It was Marguerite's way of holding Tina to her overnight bargain, a cruel way, but efficient. To book a table sufficiently near Tina and her lover—and any upstairs table was sufficiently near for the mean purpose—to sit there with the one man of all the world whom Tina loathed to meet again, who could by his mere presence make her flesh creep and tingle and her heart sicken for shame, was to Marguerite a sure and certain means of clamping the chain upon her, the chain of the furtive and secret-driven wretch who need entertain no haughty hopes of distancing his pursuers. And when Marguerite, in her black plate of a hat, with the white foxskin—in spite of August weather—slung across her muslin-dressed shoulders, arrived with the big man Merchant, the table for which he had telephoned at hazard was, by decree of satiric Fate, situate within six yards of the one that Stranger had engaged whereat to feast his love.

Marguerite could not have chosen a better weapon than her great, sleek, fair, cold man to turn upon Tina, and from the keen edge of the blade she saw her actively wince and shiver. Stranger did not see, because he was already occupied anxiously in probing an unusual mood for any cause of hurt, and only by following the direction of her eyes did he perceive the newcomers.

"There," he said, with a slight bow to Marguerite, "is Miss Allen. Is the man——"

"A friend of Marg'rite's."

Tina bowed, too, stiff and cold. Her stiff, cold fingers crumbled her roll and her mouth trembled.

Merchant more than half suspected the position; more than a little he was suddenly reminded of a soft, young wild rabbit caught in an evil gin, and he did not like it. Inquiringly, contemptuously, he looked at Marguerite, who only said:

"Hello! Fancy little Tina being here, too!"

"You didn't know?"

"Why?"

"If you did, I'd get up and"—he cast about for a punishment for the Marguerite type—"leave you to pay for your own lunch."

"I didn't know. But if I did, what matter? Don't you and little Tina care to meet? And if not, why?"

The innocent, devilish inquiry of her arched eyebrows made Merchant damn her, sotto voce, without scruple or equivocation. But she only laughed; it seemed that she was in a laughing humor.

"Listen," said she, putting her elbows on the table and leaning over to him across her clasped hands, "Tina's engaged to be married to a real, solid, eligible man."

"Ah."

"If you will trouble yourself to look, you can see him."

"Ah."

Marguerite continued: "Tina is going to be good forever."

"Ah."

Beneath the glacial blue lightning of his comprehensive look, Marguerite quailed a little, for somehow the man humbled her. She did not know why. Hating to be baffled, she continued:

"I can't think Tina will be a success as a British matron."

But again Merchant, in his blandness, merely uttered:

"Ah?"

Marguerite guessed rightly that, across the intervening tables, Tina was having trouble with her Harden, but she did not care. Rather, it added a zest to the sport she had promised herself. She could imagine, although she could not hear, much of what passed.

Tina answered Stranger's tender inquisition at length, quite frankly. She owned, "Yes, I'm worried;" and, "Yes, I do want to ask you something;" and, "But I'm sure you won't like it," till any man, let alone a lover, would have made in effect the same reply.

"Try me, darling," he said tenderly.

She began with: "You know, Harden, Marg'rite and I have been friends—I mean, we've known each other for a very long while, almost ever since I first came to London. We're used to each other. We—she hates the thought of parting."

"The best of friends must part, by marriage," said Stranger.

"Dear, she has suggested something. She says I'll be lonely. I can't house-keep, she says——"

"Out with it, dearest."

"She wants to come to Cherry Hall—to be housekeeper—or housekeeper-companion. She thinks I shall—we should—find some one useful in a post of that sort."

"Does she?" said Stranger.

"She's awf'ly tactful. She wants to keep to her own rooms like an ordinary housekeeper would. She thinks——"

"The point is, Tina, what do *you* think? You'd like it? You wouldn't like it? Eh?"

Full of the new fear of Marguerite, she dared not answer otherwise than by:

"I'd like to have her. It would be nice not to be parted altogether, now that we've been friends so long. You understand, Harden?"

"I bet, Tina," he said, playing with his wineglass stem, "that if you really want—a what-is-it—an amanuensis or

companion-housekeeper, I could find you one far better suited to the post than Miss Allen."

Vaguely in his mind he was already considering the suitability of orphan daughters of vicars, widows of army officers, and other poor and well-placed classes.

"Wouldn't I, though," he suggested, "be companion enough? At any rate, for our first year?"

She longed to cry, "Enough forever!" but she responded only murmuringly, with some faint incoherence.

"The first year," he said, bending toward her, "is always honeymoon, up to the last minute of it."

Knowing the necessity of gaining her point, however, she pressed on steadily.

"Harden, so would ours be. Marg'rite would know. She'd keep entirely to herself when we didn't want her. But—but—oh," Tina hurried on, "she's so tired of this life! You know you've said yourself it's a very hard and unsuitable one for a woman——"

"For some women."

"You maant women like Marg'rite, didn't you?" She gave him no time for contradiction. "And you see, now I'm to be rich and happy, I do feel I'd like to help her to live a life she'd enjoy."

"She wouldn't enjoy it," he said with a short laugh, thinking of Marguerite set incongruously in his old gray house.

"But—do let her try! People never know till they try. Oh, Harden, I do want it!"

"Then it's settled," he said, all softness.

"You don't mind much, dear?"

"Tina, you're to have everything you like. I only wanted you to feel that you'd left the old life entirely behind."

How she wanted it, too! She smiled, and spoke her thanks, and, looking across at Marguerite, who was just rising from her table, nodded propitiatingly. Merchant caught the nod and

bowed very slightly; and he must have felt Stranger's eyes upon him, for he turned his own to meet the gaze. For a few seconds the two men looked, holding each other's eyes, and Merchant was the first to turn away. As he went, he said to himself:

"Little Tina's getting a husband who'd be a hard fellow to knock against." But he left it at that.

Stranger asked of Tina, not looking at her:

"An acquaintance of yours, too?"

She answered steadily:

"I've met him, through Marg'rite, you know."

She looked at Stranger's face, and was afraid; a passion, a vendetta, were unveiled in it for a moment before her eyes, and she thought shiveringly:

"Oh, you must never know!"

Stranger was smiling casually once more.

"What will your Marguerite do without her admirers at Cherry Hall, if you shut her up in the housekeeper's room?"

"Oh, Marg'rite says she really hates men."

"The vampires," said Stranger, "must often have been sated by their menu."

He took Tina out driving in the Park, and told her many times, in a breathless voice belying the enforced decorum, that he loved her.

Marguerite was surprised, when she left Silver's that afternoon, to find Stranger outside the studio, with the air of having just strolled up.

Flushed with the heat, tired with the day, yet insolent in her poise, she looked more than ever an extravagant exotic that exists merely to decorate an artificial environment. She smiled at Stranger, from habit, with her lips, but her eyes did not smile. The depths of Marguerite's eyes were like smoke clouds obscuring the secrets of her soul. He asked permission to walk a little way with her, and, receiving it, enlight-

ened her without circumlocution as to the reason of his appearance there.

"Tina and I, Miss Allen, have been arranging to ask you"—and his tone expressed "resigning ourselves to endure you"—"if you couldn't give up the flat and come down as housekeeper or companion, or whatever an amanuensis position should be called, to Cherry Hall. Tina wishes it very much, and naturally her wishes are law."

Marguerite did not lose the inflections of his voice. Neither was she ignorant of the facts that he knew and despised her; that he would have liked, with the tying of his marriage knot, automatically to sever her relations with his wife. Smiling, she said:

"It would be perfectly charming, and of course you know that Tina and I have talked the matter over and that I have quite—oh, *quite*—decided to come."

"Since it's all decided, Miss Allen, there only remains for me to say to you that of course you, as an observant person, know that most people like to spend the first year or so of married life without intrusions; and equally you, as an observant person, will see that I—or any other brand-new husband—wouldn't care much for a third person in the domestic circle. I'm afraid yours will be a position requiring a great deal of tact and self-denial. That is to say, I fear you'll have to reconcile yourself to loneliness, and I should have thought that loneliness was the one thing you abhor."

"No," she answered, "loneliness isn't the only thing that I abhor."

"Damn the woman!" said Stranger to himself, without inspecting her remark. "Isn't that cold water enough to quench her?"

Aloud, he asked, with what pleasantness he could muster:

"You're determined to share our remote retreat?"

"Determined!" she said in her most caressing voice.

"We shan't often ask you to dinner!" Not a flicker of an eyelash ruffled her composure.

"I won't mind."

"I'm going to keep Tina out all day with me. You know, I've bought the small estate, and I'm going to amuse and ruin myself by farming. She's going to learn all about it."

"I'm sure little Tina will enjoy being out all day with you."

"But you?"

"There are no 'buts' where I'm concerned, Mr. Stranger."

He cast about in his mind, and said coldly:

"You won't want your London friends down? *Sure* you won't? Because——"

"Yes? Because?"

"I want Tina—and she wants—to put them all behind her. That life in Chelsea——"

"M? That life in Chelsea?"

"Was far too—promiscuous—for a girl."

"Ah? Yes? Tina wants to put it all behind her?"

"She will, when she becomes my wife."

"I'm sure she will be glad to."

Stranger half stopped, but at the polite inquiry of Marguerite's arched eyebrows, resumed their pace.

"Yes," he said coldly. "And now shall we talk business? What salary will you require?"

"Oh, my ideas on salary are elastic. The salary is immaterial."

"It's the home you want?"

"The happy home, and kindness." She turned her face away, so that he should not see the scorn that had mastered it.

"Still," he said, more coldly yet, "I prefer to have a business arrangement, and I suggest fifty guineas."

She replied carelessly:

"Oh, certainly, if you like—fifty guineas."

"You are satisfied?"

"Quite. At present."

"Here," he said, at the corner of Sloane Street, "I will leave you. Good-by."

Marguerite swung down Sloane Street. She thought, "One day, you'll be sorry. Yes, I *think* you'll be sorry you spoke." Her armor of obtuseness was not so thick as Stranger had imagined; his words had penetrated it and bitten deep, and she did not forgive him his power of arrogance any more than she could forgive Tina her triumphal reaping of the rewards of virtue that she should, by all the rules, have bartered away.

When she found Tina sitting on the window seat in the flat, dreaming, she told her of the encounter.

"Your young man walked home with me, dear, to discuss business. He did not exactly press the post upon me, but never mind about that. I'm deeply obliged to you both for your kindness." "I know you're sneering, Marg'rite, but——"

"Sneering? I! I'm in earnest. Regarding the salary, we settled on fifty guineas a year, only, for I told him that the salary was immaterial."

"I didn't think you were so careless about money."

"Careless? I! My dear child, I'm never careless about money. I meant—although I did not say so to your young man—that I could trust a lady of property like yourself to deal generously with your old friend and the recipient of your most treasured secrets."

Tina flinched slightly.

"I want some new shoes badly," said Marguerite, sitting down and criticizing a black suede slipper.

"I have an account now, at that French place in Bond Street," said Tina hurriedly, "for my trousseau shoes, you know. Do, if you like——"

"Oh, may I? You're a generous darling! I'll get a pair to-morrow. You don't mind if I run to two guineas?"

"Not a bit."

Marguerite got up and stretched herself, laughing, en route for the bedroom. As she went, she looked back over her shoulder to say, "A loan, of course! Only a *loan*!" But when the bedroom door was shut behind her, Tina could still hear her laughter.

Tina sat still upon the window seat, her dreams shattered once more. She knew what was meant; she saw what she was to face, and like a frightened child, she faced it with no plan of action. She felt a vague trust in a vague future, but that was all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Tina wanted to be married quietly, and her "quietly" meant with an absolute secretiveness that astonished her bridegroom no less than it pleased him. Like most men, he had been of the opinion that a girl loves fuss, and that on this, the supreme day of her reign, it would be cruel not to gratify every detail of her love for pageant and display. But when Tina whispered, "Let's go out suddenly, any morning this week, to any church, and *do it*," he was no laggard at procuring a special license. He kept asking:

"But are you sure, kiddie? Are you certain you won't feel afterward that you've been cheated? Because I can really rake up a lot of people who'd come in smart clothes, and we could have a reception at Claridge's or the Ritz."

She answered most steadfastly:

"Oh, please *not*!"

She was peculiarly anxious that Marguerite should not know; that no evil spirit should brood about her holy day; should watch her stand and kneel and give her hand for the ring, or hear her

make the vows that seemed to her the most beautiful vows in the world. When Stranger asked:

"But are you sure you don't want some one, some woman friend?" with, as she knew, his thoughts on Marguerite, she answered with the same urgency, "I want no one. *No one*, please! Aren't you and I enough? Aren't we all that matter?"

In a tumult of haste and delight, he bought the ring, the special license, and made the arrangements for place and hour. And at ten o'clock one morning in early September, he drove his brown car to Chelsea, with kit bag and suit case aboard.

Since Marguerite had left, soon after nine, for Silver's, Tina had had to change her ordinary frock, as she said, for her extraordinary one, and to pack. The packing, luckily, was not a serious affair, since most of the trousseau clothes had been put, on arrival, into the new cabin trunk, but it was a wildly flushed and wildly excited Tina whom her bridegroom found kneeling on the floor and trying to press together lid and lock, while a charwoman surveyed her romantically.

Somehow, in a wonderfully short space of time, more baggage was aboard the car and a tremulous girl snuggling down beside the man at the wheel.

She whispered:

"Oh, I hope I look nice for the great --the greatest day!"

They had bought the extraordinary frock together, in rapt communion, and its hem peeped out, pale, sleek, and satiny, from under the fur coat. A flower-filled little hat fitted her head closely, and under it her eyes looked out as if in starry amazement at lovely happenings.

"Tina," the man murmured back, "you're too beautiful to be true! I won't feel I've got you till we're right away together and you've promised a

thousand times that we'll never part again."

No one but the one or two officials were in the church as they entered it. They went up the aisle hand in hand, and rich lights fell through the stained-glass east window upon their heads and lay along their path to the altar. They were exalted by the holy glory of their hour, yet pulsed with the human understanding of each other. The greatest of all businesses was accomplished serenely, and again they walked in triumph down the aisle, hand in hand.

The brown car, like a glad conspirator, was drawn up by the curb, and they were in it and away with the joyous flight of free birds winging sunward in the spring. As Stranger turned the car's bonnet to the accustomed road out of town, he asked:

"Where?"

Tina did not know. The question had occurred to neither, for all they had wanted was to be married and licensed to as much earthly happiness as human beings can attain. But now that they were thus married and licensed, they had no idea where their first nesting place should be. The problem remained a problem till, for want of other plans, they found themselves driving fast down the fine Bath road, and that flight with Morris Merchant, with all its regrets, came back to the bride and darkened the sunlight of the day.

"Not here!" she cried. "Not this way!"

Obediently, at the next right turn, Stranger swung the car round north, and they traveled on, still decisionless. At length he said:

"Why not Wales? There's no such solitude anywhere else."

And she agreed, with a grateful sigh as at salvation:

"Yes, Wales. Let's be alone."

The bridal car rushed west; they found Gloucester, Hereford, Monmouth, and left them far behind in the

dust of their wheels. Uphill and downhill they ran in ecstasy toward the new life, and slowly, as in joyful reluctance, the new life, inch by inch, began to unfold, to reveal its inner glories.

For three weeks, Tina and her bridegroom lost the world; for three weeks, enchantment grew daily; for each day of three weeks, they found new marvels in each other.

Tina had not known that the gods sold such happiness or that lovers, in the only coin that is recognized in heaven's exchange, could buy it.

She said:

"It's magic."

But Marguerite, coming home late on that wedding night to the flat that Tina had shed like a scorned garment, found lying in the hall a note brought by district messenger. In her soiled-smart gown, her white foxskin, and her black hat, Marguerite, returning from dinner in Soho with an impecunious admirer, read:

We're married, dear, and we're off—we don't know where. Everywhere's lovely. Expect us back when you see us, and we shan't give any one our address. Love from

TINA.

"Ah!" said Marguerite. "You're off—you don't know where? But you shall know."

She screwed the note paper into a twist to light her cigarette and, walking into the sitting room, where the kettle bubbled on the low-turned gas ring, she held the screw of paper to the flame. She looked around her. The place was barren; a tawdry, sterile place made by woman at war with man and nature. Out in the road a man and woman quarreled, as if giving voice to the expression of the flat above, about which they knew nothing. A deep hate for it came into Marguerite's heart, and a cry such as Tina had cried in her sad days, but that Marguerite would not hear. She beat her foot upon the ground, listened

to the quarrel passing up the street, and said:

"Men! He wanted her to put the past behind her, to put *me* behind her, did he? Men! I know them. I know him. He'll see."

CHAPTER XIX.

Mrs. Harden Stranger, who had learned during her perfect honeymoon the sweet arrogance of the very young matron, did not immediately apprise Marguerite of their return. During those three weeks, distance had robbed Marguerite of some of her power of menace by innuendo, of her sway over the youthful wife's will. So, by the time the brown car carried them in a final rush of triumph up the cherry-tree avenue to the hall, on a red-brown October afternoon, she was inclined to be courageous and to arrange, at her own time and with a secure and confident hand, the Marguerite incursion.

She said: "We won't send for her directly. I'll look over things thoroughly first, myself," with a housewifely calm that delighted the three weeks' husband.

So, while Tina looked over things thoroughly—and this was also at her own time—the honeymoon lingered with them. The honeymoon remained at the full during all the talking and planning, the long walks and rides—for he began at once to teach her to ride—over the estate, the after-dinner times when, drowsy with all her hours of fresh air, she would sit on a floor cushion with her head against his arm and her eyelids dropping, dropping, over her beautiful sleepy eyes. Then he used to play silly games of Sleeping Beauty, and waken her successfully in the immemorial way.

But until Marguerite telephoned one day, the real awakening from the charming dream did not come.

When Tina's parlor maid summoned

her to the telephone, she felt in a flash, "It will be Marg'rite," and it was Marguerite.

She said, the husky richness of her voice coming very clearly over the line:

"Hello! That you, Tina, my dear? I thought you must have come out of hiding by this, and I thought I'd ask and see. How long have you been home?"

The sweet threat in Marguerite's voice demoralized Tina so that she lied vaguely:

"Oh, we're only *just* back. And I was going to write to you to-morrow."

"Nice of you, dear. You needn't bother to write now. I'll come down myself to-morrow if you're ready for me."

Tina had a fatal feeling, "As well now as later," which she transmitted over the telephone, and Marguerite replied:

"Very well, dear. To-morrow afternoon, then."

"The car will meet your train. Good-by."

Bed and sitting rooms had been prepared for Marguerite at the other side of the house, but all the intervening walls, the long corridors, could not give Tina a sense of security, since Marguerite was to be beneath the same roof. That night, as she sat on the floor cushion and nestled her head in the crook of Stranger's arm, her eyelids did not droop and her eyes were wide awake, for her brain was occupied first with finding fears and then with defeating them.

They talked for some while of many things before she told him:

"Marg'rite is coming to-morrow. She telephoned to say so."

"Is she indeed?" he said dryly. Then, "She must keep to her own side of the house and not worry us, sweetheart, eh?"

"Yes, Harden."

"I don't believe it will work at all."

Tina feared that it would.

"I have a great mind to tell her," Stranger added, "that we don't want her, after all. For we don't, do we? It was her infernal grabbing instinct that made her catch at the idea of a soft berth with a generous friend."

Alive to the necessity for propitiating Marguerite, Tina begged:

"Harden, promise to be kind!"

"Certainly, sweetheart, if it pleases you."

"She—she's awf'ly tactful. I'm sure she won't be in your way."

"Or yours?"

"I—hope not."

"You'll have to do more than 'hope' not. Women haven't a man's knack for keeping people at bay. They're too polite, too soft; they're always propitiating the world, whether they owe it propitiation or not." Very slowly drawing at his pipe, he half asked, half stated, "You little thing, you—you haven't any reason to propitiate Miss Allen."

"Of course not!" Tina cried.

With her head in the crook of his arm, she could not see the gaze that her husband bent upon her, curiously tender, curiously fierce, and patient with the patience of a man who waits a deferred climax. While he looked down at her, she looked with brooding eyes into the fire, wondering, and not guessing that he also was wondering, away on the faint track of something that he might never discover.

Presently he said, carefully, but concealing the carefulness from her:

"You're quite happy with me? Sometimes, out of idleness, a man gets supposing. Supposing she had married the other fellow, whichever he was——" After a long pause, during which Tina only gave a murmurous laugh, he continued, "Supposing you'd married, for instance, that chap Ferriss I used to meet at your flat?"

"Well," she said, "supposing I had?"

A line cleared from between Stranger's brows and came again.

"I dare say you had that photographer fellow—Silver—at your feet. Now supposing you'd married him?"

"Well," she laughed, "supposing I had?"

The line cleared once more from between his brows.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I was only supposing."

After a while he added:

"I suppose a lot of chaps used to hang around that flat. Two pretty girls living alone run frightful risks of getting—of being—of knocking up against the most impossible bounders. Didn't you find it so?"

Not for a moment did she guess that he was seeking something.

"Oh, I don't know, dear," she said. "Oh—yes—perhaps sometimes!"

"I can't remember meeting any one," he said after another pause, during which his teeth had gripped rather hard on his pipestem, "except those two—Silver and Ferriss. I thought Ferriss was all right, as far as men are all right with a pretty woman. Oh, and there was that other fellow, of course, Addlehead or something."

To himself he thought contemptuously of the slim and shabby Addlebourne:

"He's right off the line. But Silver? But Ferriss?"

Unperturbed by his thoughts, Tina only returned to her mourning:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Marg'rite's coming to-morrow."

"Then you don't want——"

"Oh, yes, Harden. Don't think that. I do want her. She—she *must* come."

On the morrow Marguerite came, tall, languorous, heavy scented as the roses in the garden, with a new white veil round her old black hat, and the gift of a London-bred woman for looking opulent whatever the private state of her purse. As she stepped from the

car, which had met her at the station, she saw the tea table being set up under the cedar on the lawn, by the perfect parlor maid. She noted the white wicker chairs with green cushions grouped around; the brilliant banks and beds of autumn flowers; the orderly comfort of everything about her. And she smiled one of those furtive smiles of hers that did little more than twitch the corners of her carmine lips.

"Oil!" she would have said ribaldly, had she spoken. "Little Tina's struck oil!"

As she stood with her foot on the lowest of the steps that led up to the open door, wondering a little if Tina would not soon hasten to her through the big, cool hall in, at any rate, a simulated welcome, Tina appeared in the doorway with the suddenness of a sprite.

"Oh, Marg'rite!"

"Oh, Tina!"

The two girls kissed, then stood off from each other for the involuntary survey. Tina said with flurried kindness:

"Aren't you hot and tired? Come to your room at once, won't you?"

And Marguerite exclaimed almost simultaneously, in her most graceful manner:

"You're looking simply sweet, bride! And I have such a big quarrel with you and that husband of yours that I don't know where to begin."

"Come in," Tina reiterated, with the same haste.

She led the way along all those corridors to the farthest wing, and Marguerite followed, talking lightly, but thinking the other girl an arrant fool, thinking how low her pluck was, how ludicrously susceptible her conscience, how childish her lack of ease. These things amused Marguerite; they gave mischief to her glowing face, a remorseless sparkle to her eye, and stimulation to her brain. Begging Tina to remain

while she took off her hat, rummaged for a clean handkerchief, powdered her nose, she was filled with this merciless fun.

"First," she began, "how is *he*? How is the lord, the sultan? Damn him!"

When that had been answered, she asked, with a hand on each of the other girl's shoulders:

"And you? Happy?"

"Very happy," Tina replied faintly.

"Ah," said Marguerite, "that's good. I'm glad, dear. I've been afraid—just a *leetle* tiny bit afraid—that you'd let out something."

"What do you mean?" Tina answered, with a defiance that lacked fire because of its hesitations.

Marguerite cried:

"Oh, don't be stiff! It's ridiculous to be stiff with me. You know as well as I do that it's Morris Merchant whom I mean. And you know as well as I do, my dear, that it wouldn't do for your husband to know, too. Well, dear, I'm glad you've been a wise child, glad you've taken my advice and stopped raking over the past. Now you can be happy."

But as Marguerite dropped her hands and turned for a last look at her carefully powdered face, Tina saw in the mirror the reflection of her smile.

"I don't know, Marg'rite, why you should be always—*always*—remembering."

"My dear, surely it was you who *always—always—remembered*."

"Perhaps it was."

"You remembered far too well."

Marguerite took at Tina the keen and furtive look with which one woman surveys another, took in the pure whiteness of her clothes, from the silk-knitted coat to the buckskin shoe tip, and in her sweetest contralto voice said:

"You're expensive, Mrs. Stranger, oh, very expensive! How am I to live up to you?"

Words hovered upon Tina's tongue,

words conveying the cool facts that Marguerite would not be expected to live up to the mistress of Cherry Hall; that Marguerite had her rooms, and would not, too often, be invited from them. But she dared not speak them. She looked through the latticed windows at the now distant cedar tree beneath which the white tablecloth fluttered, and murmured:

"Tea's ready, Marg'rite. Let's have tea. You'll have it with us this afternoon, won't you?"

"Why, Tina dear, where else should I have tea?"

Tina took a steady look at her friendly enemy, summoned her courage, and replied:

"When Harden is at home, you'll be served here, won't you? Harden is— is very averse, you know, to a third person. You'll remember we're only just married——"

Marguerite tucked her arm within Tina's.

"Dear soul," said she, "I know my place. Rely upon that. Meanwhile, I die for tea, so take me to it."

Tina's husband waited under the cedar for their approach, with a frown for the familiar affection of their attitude. Very coldly he greeted Marguerite, and as they sat down in the wicker chairs, he placed himself between them more ostentatiously than he knew.

Marguerite saw it, and a cold anger filled her; Tina saw it, and a cold fear filled her; but Stranger talked stolidly on matters of commonplace stupidity, with what both women took for denseness. Yet he was on fire.

He took his wife away from Marguerite directly the last empty teacup had been put down; he linked his hand in Tina's arm, hoped, coldly, that the newcomer would like her rooms, and walked away with the white girl up the lawn, leaving Marguerite to look after them, to bite her lower lip and savagely sigh.

It grew cold on the lawn, the sun having set redly and the crisp chill of an October evening invading the air. Tenderly Stranger pressed his wife's arm; tenderly he drew the light blouse about her throat.

"I wish," he said, "that women would wear more. But it's very pretty."

"Harden," she said, "you don't like her?"

"No, Tina."

"Harden, you'll be nice?"

"I hope so, darling, when it's necessary to meet her. But will it be often necessary?"

"Perhaps not," Tina hesitated.

"Let's walk down by the dahlia borders." Then, when they had passed out of sight of the figure sitting under the cedar trees, he stood still and wrapped his wife in his arms.

"Dearest," he said, "I'm sure you have some reason for asking her here. Wouldn't you like to tell me what it is?"

CHAPTER XX.

The dusk was beginning to fall when Stranger asked his question, and there was in that gray silence, out of which the great red and orange dahlias flamed, the still and spiritual quality that makes for confidence. Yet Tina could not give her confidence.

Vainly, rather flutteringly, she repeated after him his question.

"You think I've some reason for asking Marg'rite here?"

"Well, darling," he asked, "have you?"

"No, Harden," she said huskily. "I haven't. Really I haven't."

"Very well, my little one." He pulled the silk coat more closely about her and drew her along the path.

"I—I just thought, you see, Harden, that—that—she wanted to come, and it wouldn't matter much to us—and she was lonely—and we had been friends

for so long. It doesn't matter much to us, does it, dear?"

"No, no," he said, "it doesn't matter. Don't worry over it. You must come indoors, for it's getting cold."

They left outside the chill gray evening, and went into the hall, where a great fire blazed, and sat down. And presently Stranger followed up, as it seemed to her lively apprehensions, the thread of what he had said in the garden.

"A secret shared is a burden halved, you know, wee Tina."

"What an original thought!" she cried in bright derision, hoping that he would not see the trembling of her hands.

The man smiled.

"I wasn't trying to be original, my sweetheart."

He had seen the quiver of her hands, and his own were very still.

"I hate secrets," she said, thrusting out a foot to warm it before the blaze, but the foot trembled, too, till she had to withdraw it. "I'm sure I could never keep one."

"If I were you, I wouldn't try, you little thing."

"I promise you I won't."

Ashamed of the treachery of this, she leaned toward the fire and made a show of warming first her hands, then her feet, with rapid changes of position that might serve to conceal her tremors. Reluctant to look at him, she yet wished to hear his voice, to read its inflections.

"I got quite cold in the garden."

"I was afraid you would, dear," he said, easily accepting her change of topic.

She tried to think of other things to say, and observed:

"The—*the dahlias* are a great success."

"Yes," he said, softly and kindly.

Tina wished that her husband would not look at her. She felt his eyes upon her face, upon her small restless feet

and her small shaking hands; and, though the eyes were passionately kind, they yet searched her. Raising her own for a shrinking moment, she met their full, soft, piercing regard. She huddled back into the oak chair, where the light from the flames could not reach her face; and there, in shadow, she stayed during a long silence. Her husband rose at last to go to some business with his steward, and as he passed her chair, he put out his large hand to stroke her bowed head caressingly. The sympathy and assurance of this caress gave her a new confirmation of the dread that his tentative inquiry had aroused, seeming to assert the hint of his suspicion. For a long while she sat there in the shadow, listening only to the hurry of her heart and the ticking of the great clock in a far corner.

"If he guesses! If he thinks there's anything between Marg'rite and me! If he keeps on asking, could I go on denying? What does he think? Oh, God help me!" Tina prayed as she huddled back in the old oak chair.

She realized, as she sat there, that, as far as regarded the inner things, her husband was unknown to her. He had come to her out of anywhere, nowhere—in a railway carriage, in fact, traveling a chance journey into Bucks. She remembered the light vanity with which she had found pleasure in his silent admiration; she remembered the tense and growing expectation experienced throughout their ripening acquaintance; she remembered the sunny afternoon when she had told him that he spoiled the world; and again the sunny afternoon when he had, indeed, saved for her the world. She knew that as a lover she had found him perfect, and that now, though merged into the husband, he remained the prince of dreams.

But yet—

Did she know the manner of man she had married? What lay behind the

burning question of his occasional glances? What hid beneath his frequent fierce silences? What more than was spoken expressed itself in such words as he had said just now when he had spoken of secrets?

As women can and do in introspective moments; Tina brought analysis to bear upon him—her faulty analysis untutored by knowledge; and she found him astonishingly upright, astonishingly rigid, yet magnificently passionate when the memory of that attempted kiss on the first day in the car brought her up against a contradiction of uprightness, or, at any rate, of rigidity. Arrested, she paused before it; it had been—it had been—reminiscent of Morris Merchant, and that was why she had cried. It had been faintly indicative, a step on the road, of ordinary promiscuity, libertinage.

Suddenly daring, and sidetracked by this interest from the melancholy of her fears, Tina thought:

"I'll ask him!"

And she smiled into the fire as at the memory of many kisses.

"He promised once to tell me, some day, about it. Hasn't some day come? I'll ask him why. I wonder—I wonder what he'll say."

Slowly Tina climbed the wide staircase to her room, where the perfect parlor maid, who valeted them both a little, awaited her coming. A light fire of wood crackled, and candlelight spread its amber glow palely over the flowered chintz and the silver and the ivory toilet trifles that, coming as a visitor to this very room, she had so coveted and admired. Now, with the carelessness of possession, she could look around, accustomed to it all. Yet, even now, the thought crossed her afresh that it was desirable, and again her determination waxed:

"He must never, never know."

"Mars," she said to the maid, "I want my daffodil frock."

And Mars put away the gown she had brought out and took the daffodil frock from its peg.

Tina wished, for some reason, to look lovely; to flaunt, to triumph, to rule. It was a feeling of infinite littleness, but it braced her till her eyes danced and her young blood sang. She threw off the white skirt and the white coat, kicked away her shoes, and sat down before the mirror. While Mars brushed her hair for the requisite ten minutes that it received twice daily, she manicured her nails and remembered with a flavor of idle enjoyment how, in old days, she used to cram her little tools into her cheap bag and exclaim:

"I'll have to do my nails at Silver's."

How far behind, and for what irrevocable eternity, she had left those workaday mornings!

When the hair was dressed in the neat and silken swathes that fashion demanded, and the daffodil frock was on, making her more of a little white-and-golden girl than ever, she bade Mars tap at Mr. Stranger's dressing-room door and ask him to come in when ready.

Tina sat down alone in a chintz chair by her odorous wood fire and thought again about her husband.

She would not believe with Marguerite that all men were bad; neither could she believe—for were there not Morris Merchants in the world?—that all men were good; but—all men were certainly queer. She had decided that they were all like animals and children and gods when Stranger tapped and entered, and in a rush of knowledge all foolish analyses were swept away, because she saw only one man who was her lover, and all her heaven and earth besides.

For she loved him.

Scarcely till that moment had Tina known how she loved Stranger, but her love at that moment was like a manifestation of light to her straight

from paradise, and dropping the little tools that she was still handling, she stood up and held out her arms.

"Oh, Harden!" she quavered.

Stranger wrapped her in a whirlwind embrace and kissed her. She sat upon his knees while he occupied her chintz chair, and, with her arms about him, laid her face against his neck.

"I did want you!" she whispered, acutely aware now how she had.

"What is it, baby?" he murmured fondly. "Why did you send for me? What is it, love?"

"Nothing," she said, "just nothing. Why should it be anything more than this? Isn't this enough? If you don't like it, say so."

"No cheek, baby!" he grinned, stopping her mouth.

When she was free, she said, with a lifting of the short upper lip in one of those smiles part mischief, part delight:

"But I did want to ask you something, too. I wanted to ask you why you wanted me to kiss you that day—the first day you took me in the car—and why you said you were glad I wouldn't?"

Stranger hesitated.

"Oh, that!" he murmured against her cheek. "Why bring up old scores?"

"Because I want to know awf'ly."

"Baby," he said, "I'd rather not tell you, after all. It'll make me feel mean, a spy, a rotter. Shall we just let it go at that?"

But when, with her arms winding closer and closer about his neck, she insisted, he made a rather regretful explanation.

"You see, little thing, it was like this: I fell in love with you, and I wanted you very badly; that is to say, I wanted to marry you, but——"

"But?"

"Here's the mean part that you've got to forgive. But you see, darling, I'd knocked about a great deal, and I

wasn't very illusioned about your sex, and I didn't want to tie myself up in knots unless—I mean, you see, I didn't want to make a mistake. You see, sweetheart, marriage is a serious game."

"People—men—have told me so before."

Stranger started a little, and hesitated before he went on in shamed apology:

"Well, darling girl, of course I knew from the first that you were perfect; the most fastidious little girl in the world. But perhaps you'd be surprised if you knew how often and how thoroughly a man can be deceived when a woman's in question. So I wondered. Quite unforgivable, wasn't it?"

"You thought you'd test me?"

"I sound like a brute, Tina. But most of the women I've met knocking around had been so fatally—easy that I hoped you'd refuse me. You see, I loved you, and I wanted to love you more. Are you angry?"

"No; not angry."

His wife sat upright upon his knees and wondered to herself:

"What made him think I might be 'fatally easy,' too? It isn't as if he knew——"

Then reminders of Morris Merchant's embraces, suffered so passively, so acquiescently, visited her, scorching her cheeks, searing her eyes with hot tears. Those tears she hid from Stranger, but in the candlelight he could see the crimson bloom upon her face.

"Don't worry, love," he exclaimed contritely.

She answered sweetly:

"Don't think I worry, or don't think I'm vexed, Harden. I understand that men want to choose ever so carefully the girls they marry."

The words weighed upon her; she felt convicted of treachery before her own soul and his, yet she dared not have

it otherwise. Each sentence that he had uttered confirmed her at once in her terror and her resolve.

"So," he said in a low tone, playing with his two rings upon her finger, "I wanted to forego, to wait for, that kiss, though I longed for it. I would have hated you to be willing to kiss me just because I could buy you flowers or drive you about in my car. That's what other women are—willing to kiss for these little temporary pleasures that men can give. Never mind, my Tina. We won't think about it."

Below in the hall a gong was struck, with slow, booming strokes that penetrated curiously to Tina's brain. She reiterated to herself his last words, "We won't think about it. We won't think about it;" and, "He shall never know. Oh, God, if he knew! God help me!"

For she knew that night, as never before, how she loved him.

Dinner was an intimate business, she sitting close to his right hand in her daffodil gown, rosy in the pink gloom of the shaded table lights, he pressing her hand, behaving like a lovely boy whenever the perfect parlor maid was not looking. Away in the farther wing of the house Marguerite ate her solitary meal, but the thought of her intruded hardly at all upon them. Not until a maid brought a message, as they were sitting over coffee in the hall, did Tina again feel the touch of the hand that was forever opening her cupboard door a crack—an inch—two inches—threatening to turn loose the skeleton.

"Miss Allen would be glad to speak to you before she retires, ma'am."

Harden asked: "Shall I come, too?" but in a small and hurried voice, she declined his company to Marguerite's wing. She hurried down the long corridor with the premonition of trouble vexing her again.

Marguerite had dined, and was ex-

tended upon a Chesterfield, coffee cup beside her and smoking a cigarette. She wore the blouse and skirt in which she had arrived, and as Tina entered, she lifted her head like a greyhound sighting a hare, and took a long look at her—at the beauty of her gown, her shoes, her swathed and silky hair.

She dropped her head upon the cushion again without speaking.

"I hope," Tina said, "that you had a nice dinner, dear."

"Everything," Marguerite said graciously, "is most comfortable. Aren't you going to sit down?"

Tina sat down.

"Or," said Marguerite with an indescribable smile, "should your housekeeper spring up and stand to attention when you honor her?"

"Oh, Marg'rite! How absurd!"

Marguerite loved the sport of baiting, and she understood it well.

"Have you any orders for me, dear?" she asked. "That's all I wanted to know. Believe me"—her humility mocked the other woman—"I shouldn't have troubled you otherwise. Aren't you going to tell me what I'm expected to do? I suppose I inspect the kitchens, order the meals, arrange the flowers, and perhaps write your letters. Please, Tina, instruct me."

"To-morrow," said poor Tina. "Won't it do to-morrow? Then I will show you and give you the keys."

"Ah, yes," said Marguerite, supine upon her couch, "to-morrow will do. You know, dear, I'm not an impatient person. I can wait for anything in the world if I want it. To-morrow you'll give me the keys of your house. The keys of your heart I have already. Laugh, my dear Tina, do. Melodrama's always a joke, and that's melodrama, blue and purple! To-morrow you'll give me the keys of your house. The keys of your heart I have already."



The Last Record

By Mary Woodson Shippey

SCARLETT rushed into the offices of the Woodford Phonograph Company like one pursued. He thumped loudly on the private office door of the manager, which showed he was not quite himself, and when that official failed to respond, he thumped again. Having been admitted, he leaned his back against the closed door to pant.

"Have you seen the morning paper?"

Mr. Drake, the manager, smiled grimly.

"Yes," he said tersely. "I have!"

"She's given us the slip," announced Scarlett superfluously. "She promised to sing for me this morning at ten, and I was to try out my receiving-record invention. I had everything all ready and then— Oh, Lord! And how I've worked to get that woman to promise to sing for us—"

"And the money you've spent!"

"And the money I've spent! How I've groveled and rolled over and sat up and begged! And after she'd promised me to sign up and sing this morning, while I waited and waited, that treacherous cat had calmly embarked on the *Victoria*, which sails at two—"

Mr. Drake smiled a disagreeable, disappointed smile. Some way it made young Scarlett's blood run cold.

"We depended on you to get that record," he said sourly. "You've just lost us some cool thousands of dollars; that's all. No company has ever got even her promise to sing before. If we'd got her voice exclusively—the greatest prima donna the world has ever known—" He broke off to puff furiously at a cigar. "Of course," he added, not troubling to disguise his an-

ger, "we feel you've failed us, Scarlett. We expected you to get Madame Carrera's voice. I wish we'd trusted it to Thyme. He's resourceful!"

Scarlett swallowed this with a gulp. It was very unjust. He had almost sweated blood over Carrera. He had dangled about her for months with every conceivable bribe. But Carrera suffered from severe enlargement of the ego, aggravated by frequent attacks of chronic temperament. She exacted very much and gave very little in return. And as for Thyme— Well, after a struggle, Scarlett swallowed the allusion to Thyme, too. Why, he had beaten Thyme to death getting unusual records.

A little silence fell. Mr. Drake bluntly turned his back on Scarlett with a "thumbs-down" movement and became ostentatiously busy at his desk.

Scarlett stood making the circuit of his round hat with his capable fingers. His eyes were big and hurt. They were more than that—they were worried. For young Scarlett had done a very foolish thing. He had gone and got married without the knowledge or approval of a single one of the lady's relatives. Moreover, they had depended upon this record to make possible the announcement, since it had meant a plenty of money in young Scarlett's pocket, which was the only valid objection to him.

The sunshine that filtered palely through the window wasn't there to Scarlett. His entire horizon was reddened by furiously swearing thoughts.

"If you had got that record," said Mr. Drake, adding insult to injury from out a haze of cigar smoke, "we'd

planned to increase your salary by two hundred dollars a month. You'd have been worth it. And if that receiving-record thing of yours had proved out, we were going to give you a royalty on every record it made, beside buying it from you. You'd have earned it. And you'd have been well fixed for a young man——"

Scarlett got the "would have been." Certain dear visions he had locked up in his thumping heart grew dimmer. They had to do with apartments and furniture and the servant problem. As they faded, certain plebeian visions of tailors and landlords and haberdashers took on a more gigantic shape, discouragingly. Around and around his hat went Scarlett's hands, absently. Murderous thoughts shouldered through his brain. That old black-eyed, black-haired siren! That confounded old treacherous, deceitful she-devil——

His eyes concentrated absently on the top of Mr. Drake's head. There was a little bald peak on it, sticking up like a bleak crag out of a bushy moor. And doubtless because Mr. Drake's bald spot had nothing at all to do with it, the Great Idea came. Scarlett's eyes began to glow as they absently stared at the crag with the sun shining behind it. Unconsciously he smiled and his mouth opened as if he were himself amazed at the bigness of the idea. Half consciously he watched the smoke of Mr. Drake's cigar roll upward like a cloud and blow across the crag, obliterating it. When the wind had shifted the cloud and the sun dazzled behind it again, the whole thing was settled in Scarlett's mind.

"That boat sails at two," he murmured dreamily, still staring.

Mr. Drake signed a letter with a flourish.

"Could you," said Scarlett, still dreamily, "write me a check for several thousand dollars?"

Mr. Drake whirled about as if half

suspecting he would find Scarlett covering him with two huge revolvers.

"What the devil?" he demanded testily, when he discovered his fears groundless.

When he had turned around, the bushy furze in the immediate foreground blotted out the crag in the perspective. This seemed to break the spell. Scarlett suddenly looked like a wide-awake, flesh-and-blood man again.

"I'm going to Europe," he announced. "I'm going this afternoon if you'll write me that check."

"What's that for?" demanded Mr. Drake.

"I'm going to get that record," said Scarlett, as if surprised at himself.

"How can you——"

"I'm going," said Scarlett, with the look that had preceded the capture of all the difficult records he had to his credit. "I'm going to *get* that record! I'm going to bundle up my paraphernalia and take passage on the *Victoria* this afternoon if I have to stow away. I'm going to camp on that dago's trail till I get a record of her voice if it takes me till Christmas."

As he further recited in minute detail just exactly what he intended to do, Mr. Drake, after one satisfied look at him, turned back to his desk and wrote out an adequate check. He was even smiling a little.

Having secured a last little "hole of a stateroom on the *Victoria* and embarked at the last minute after a spectacular dash up the gangway, one might have fancied that Scarlett's first duty would have been to seek Carrera's whereabouts. But with Madame Carrera safely secreted with her retinue in her sumptuous suite, Scarlett did no such thing. Instead, while the band played and the myriad little white handkerchiefs fluttered, Scarlett shouldered his way through the crowd, searching diligently and evidently for

something else. Tug whistles blew and screeched and little boats chugged about in the hurly-burly of departure, like busy little mischief-makers, but Scarlett wasn't looking at them.

In half an hour, he found what he was searching for—a woman. She stood clinging to the rail by a big, fat lifeboat. She was weeping bitterly. Beside her stood a major-generalesque sort of woman, very smartly dressed. One could tell just by the look of her that she considered herself responsible for the weeper. She alternately thumped her young companion on the back with one hand and offered her smelling salts with the other. Scarlett stood and looked at her furiously, much as he had looked at Mr. Drake's bald spot only a few hours ago. Again his horizon was reddened by furiously swearing thoughts. He very evidently did not like the major-generalesque woman; doubtless because she bristled with the importance of her trust.

He waited patiently, securely sheltered by a stout old gentleman who waved his arms spasmodically every time he said "the land of the free" or "God's country," which was often. Presently the major generaless wheeled about and marched away, on very accustomed and seaworthy legs and with every symptom of returning presently. Scarlett was promptly by the side of the weeping damosel. Quite masterfully, he seized the girl's hands and dragged them down. Her startled scream froze on her lips. Her great eyes stared at him and stared and stared. They wore a wonderful look. Quite unashamedly, Scarlett took her in his arms. But she pushed him back to stare again.

"Why, *Hugh Evans Scarlett!*" she breathed at last. Then, with a little cry, she flung herself into his arms again. "Whatever in the world?" she cried. "When did you get on? Didn't you have time to get off? What will

you do? Here I was just—crying my eyes out because you—hadn't even come down to—wave at me if you—couldn't—kiss me—good-by—I had a horrid feeling I'd never see you again—and here you walk right up and—and—oh, Hugh! And how you got here is more than I can say, and why you're here I can't guess, and where the—the money came from I can't fathom——"

"Hey, wait a minute!" cried Scarlett. "I'm going all the way to Europe with you!"

The weeping damosel pushed him away again.

"*Are* you?" she said solemnly, lifting her wonderful, big eyes to his once more. "Truly, Hugh?"

"Isn't that bully? Here, let's get somewhere where I can get an honest-to-goodness kiss before Aunt Liz comes back." Which mutilation of her name would have been quite enough to give that worthy lady her first attack of seasickness.

Quite without regard for any one's tender feelings, heart or feet, Scarlett hustled the quite willing damosel to a more secluded spot, where they promptly melted into a long embrace. What are mere explanations to a love like this? Then, after they had assured each other of their perfectly palpable delight at the prospect of a voyage together, when they had expected to be so forlorn—one on her way to do duty at the bedside of a sick and very irascible father in London, the other grinding away at home for a cruel employer, and each yearning for nothing so much as the arms of the other—Scarlett explained:

"You know how hard I've been trying to get Carrera to sing for the company. Well, late yesterday I finally hooked her with an offer. Whew! Almost more money than there is. And she was to sing for us this morning, and I was to have a chance to prove

at last what my improved method of taking records really meant, and we were to have the only record made of Carrera's voice, and little Hugh Scarlett was going to be the man who had finally achieved the triumph. Well! I went after her in a taxi, and while I was cooling my heels at the hotel waiting for her, I happened to buy a paper which informed me that the madame was sailing on the *Victoria* to-day. She had granted an interview on the boat last night! And just then her fool maid came with madame's compliments, to say that she had changed her mind and would stick to her original intention of singing for no canned-music concern in the world. It began to dawn on me that I had been made a fool of, somewhat, or else that she was—just plain contrary!" said Scarlett, crimson-faced at the memory, waving a futile arm. .

"What on earth did you do?"

"What could I do? I went back to the office. Lord, but Drake was mad! I thought he was going to fire me on the spot. I tried to tell him, but he insisted on blaming me with the bum disposition madame was born with and——"

"The cross old bear!"

"Sure was! And then he talked a lot about what they had intended to do for me if I had got that record. It would have been my fifth in six months that had been considered hopeless, you know. Said they were going to raise my salary and buy my invention and give me a royalty on every record and——"

"Oh, Hugh!"

"And I was mad, and in a hurry to get away and see you before your boat sailed, and then suddenly it came over me all at once that you were sailing on the same boat she was and why couldn't I have the lark of a trip with you and get the record, too, right here on the boat. And here I am. Why, darling,

with that much money I can tell everybody, even Aunt Liz, that you are my own little wife, married for safe-keeping a whole, hungry month ago. And their only objection can be cleared away with the snap of my fingers. And I'm going to get that money! Hear?"

From which it is to be gathered that this lovable, foolish, unbelievably rich young weeping damosel was the woman this foolish, lovable, comparatively penniless Hugh Scarlett had gone and married.

Following his bold assertion, the weeping damosel gasped suddenly and as suddenly clutched.

"Aunt Elizabeth!" she whispered.

"Oh, Aunt Liz!" exclaimed young Scarlett, enjoying a mental picture of the deathly shudders that would chase one another up and down that lady's rigid spine if she could only hear him.

"When again?" asked the damosel, who kept her wits about her.

"Moonlight? Eight-thirty. Here."

After which the weeping damosel darted hypocritically after Aunt Elizabeth, and young Scarlett strolled nonchalantly off with his hands in his pockets, *not* in the direction of Aunt Liz.

At dinner that night the diva condescended to leave her suite and sit at the captain's table. She was all silk and suavity, her sleek head perfectly coiffed, her little, lovable manners all on straight, her myriad whimsies and coquetries wonderful to see. Every one was so charmed with her and so honored—save one. She was a sleek, silky little person on her own account, very good to look upon, with great, devotional eyes and a sweet, tender, determined, rebellious little mouth. She was the heiress, Miss Charlotte Gail, properly chaperoned by her well-starched Aunt Elizabeth.

Off at an ordinary table, with the commoner herd, sat a tall, very good-looking young giant whose eyes con-

stantly vacillated between the two women. On the deep-chested diva, he bent a glowering scowl; on the younger woman, an odd little look of shy, husbandly pride, mixed with a lot of worship. Half consciously he compared the two women to his own satisfaction. There *she* sat, with her confounded impudence, cheating him out of his wife and home—his little wife! There that woman sat, the outrageous cheat, complacently, with money to throw to the fishes! No wonder she could afford to be independent with the record company! And there *he* sat, cheated out of everything that life held dear because of that confounded impudence and opulence.

While the music blared out loudly, Scarlett tried the sound of "My own little wife!" whispered low and tenderly into his coffee cup, as he dreamed of whispering it some day. He lifted a pair of such suddenly glorified eyes that a spare woman who sat opposite, in a last year's model evening dress palpably reduced to fit, set her glasses straight and patted her hair.

After dinner, as Madame Carrera trailed out of the dining salon, Scarlett, good looking, dapper, faultlessly dressed, spoke softly to her. She recognized him after a second's icy staring.

"Does madame, perhaps, feel like favoring me with a—song?" inquired Scarlett, in his most dashing impudent way. He knew madame. One must pretend to be high-handed.

Madame snapped her fingers and "tra-la-laed" at him.

"Certainly *not*," said madame on her deepest note. "I have said!"

"Madame Carrera," said Scarlett, respectfully, yet masterfully, "I have come to get that—song. You promised me. I've got to get it. When will you sing it for me?"

Madame waved him aside with her fan.

"You ar-re verree persistent, Mees-tair—Scarlett," she said indignantly.

But suddenly she lifted her long black eyes to him. They lured, tempted, teased, all at once. It was a little way madame had. She could not help it. A man was always a man—and young Scarlett was very good looking.

"But I like your—noive!" drawled Madame Carrera, with a twinkle.

While she brushed by him haughtily, she didn't quite wither him, and while she left him, she hadn't quite refused. It was another little way madame had. Presently she sent a covert little peep at him over her shoulder and then a dazzling, tormenting smile. Scarlett, knowing she would, had waited, rather shamefacedly. He shifted his eyes afterward and encountered those of the weeping damosel, as she stood, all shimmering white, against the dark red of a drapery. She wore a strange, blazing look. She had witnessed the meeting evidently, and as evidently had not liked it. There was no chance to explain. Things didn't feel very pleasant in Mr. Scarlett's heart.

Days passed, days of playing at odd hide and seek, first with the coquettish Carrera and then with the vigilant Aunt Elizabeth, who, though she didn't know "that young Scarlett" by sight, had heard of him, you may be sure, and seemed determined to deliver her young niece loverless to her sick father if such a thing could be done.

Scarlett flirted outrageously with madame. It was the only way. To be tolerated, if one were male, and allowed to dangle in her train, one must always be amorously a-sighing. Scarlett always explained this laboriously to his wife in the hidden places where they met, and was always loyally believed whether he was or not, though her big eyes looked terribly hurt and frightened at times. There could be no doubt

about whom she had singled out to blame.

So Scarlett would be caressing with Carrera and she would seem to enjoy it, and then he would be impudent with her and she would seem to enjoy that, although she invariably adopted the attitude of a pouting child longing to be coaxed. She, in turn, would flout him and urge him on, to flout him and urge him on again. And Scarlett was flouted and urged on and flouted again with great outward patience, though inwardly he fumed and it sickened him. Knowing her temperament so well, he humored her whims, but he got absolutely nowhere. He was beginning to feel a disappointment so keen that he feared it. The journey was almost over, and he had gained exactly nothing. As the battle to gain his wife became more difficult, she grew correspondingly more dear, and a longing almost as terrible as his discouragement assailed him. The weeping damosel was such a dependable, lovable, genuine person, with so many sweet, wistful, utterly guileless little ways. And she was such a blessed relief from Carrera, who studied and watched the effect of every word, every arch, graceful little gesture.

Scarlett and the weeping damosel held a very dejected council of war in a big, black shadow, one night when the voyage was nearly over. Scarlett was horribly discouraged. He was heartily tired of being madame's puppet. It was all very well to boast about camping on madame's trail and getting her voice if it took until Christmas, when one was in the first triumphant flush of a brand-new determination, but when it came to the actual carrying out of the threat— And here at the last was madame huffy at something and shutting herself up in her suite and refusing even to communicate with him, although her various retainers were waxing fat off Mr. Drake's money.

Scarlett kicked about with his feet a good deal and said a great many wild, mad things. Some of them frightened the weeping damosel very much indeed, as, for instance, when he vowed that he was tired of waiting and swore that he would announce their marriage as soon as the trip ended, whether he got his record or not.

"Oh, but, Hugh," she begged, "he's really so sick! Please, please just wait until he's better! Oh, Hugh, you know I wouldn't have minded at—at first if it hadn't been for that. I'm not afraid of poverty. It's only that he—he takes things that he doesn't like so—*hard*, Hugh!"

When they parted, after a smothering embrace, the weeping damosel wore an odd, straight line between her lips that was a perfect stranger to her face and had no business in the world smoothing out such delightful curves.

The next morning found all the lifeboats lowered and swung out on their davits. The passengers were unusually gay, to hide the shudder that passed through the ship when they realized that they had reached the danger zone. The captain, a resourceful man with ideas, had sent out a thinly veiled order for every one on board who was able to stand to turn out for a new and fascinating game. It consisted of pinning on little leather numbers, locating the lifeboats with corresponding numbers, scattering, and then, at the sound of a signal, relocating the boats and forming a line without any confusion. They were to play at it all morning, just for fun.

Even madame herself appeared, radiant in a wonderful gown. She carried her toy dog for its daily airing. As she mounted the companionway to the deck, she descried Scarlett standing at the top, his number already pinned on. So, also, did a slim young woman who followed closely at her heels. Madame bridled. The young

woman's nose tiptilted airily, and her great eyes looked upward as innocently as could be, but her mouth was wearing a brand-new look. As she hastened by madame, her hand slyly reached out and tweaked the dog's tail sharply. The little beast yelped wildly, swallowing its yelp in a vicious snap. Its teeth grazed the arm of the weeping damosel. She turned furiously on madame.

"That little beast has bitten me!" she cried, clapping her handkerchief over her arm.

"*Non*," cried madame, stiffening imperiously. "He iz so gen-tle——"

"He has *bitten* me!" declared the girl again. "And I was merely passing by. He's a vicious little brute! He snapped at me yesterday when your maid had him on deck. I shall have him put to death——"

Madame's eyes darted lightning.

"He iz *not* vicious!" she cried. "If he iz, he mus' be zick!"

"Sick!" cried the girl in sharp alarm. "It might be hydrophobia! I shall have him put to death at once!"

"*Non, non!*" shrilled madame, suddenly losing her hauteur, suddenly clutching the little beast close to her heart. "He iz my babee! I could not bear it! Oh, *non!*"

A little crowd was gathering, attracted by the angry voices, and the weeping damosel looked hard and oddly at Scarlett, who hastened up to them, a faint smile around her mouth under her angry, frowning eyes. A strange telepathy flashed a message that Scarlett caught. With a sudden, crafty look, he flashed back that he understood.

"I shall see the captain at once," cried the indignant wounded lady. "It is certainly dangerous to have the beast about with children aboard."

Madame clutched her "babee" closer, emotional tears bright in her eyes.

"Pleez, pleez!" she begged. "I will

keep heem safe in my suite. I will pay ze doctor your bill. I will——"

Madame knew the dog was winked at in the suite for her sake. She knew also that Miss Gail's wealth was even greater than her own, and that money talks. She was terribly agitated.

And the young woman seemed to get a vicious pleasure out of her public, groveling humility. This was not so unnatural or unkind, after all, considering that her brand-new lord and master had had to dance attendance upon the spoiled and petted diva so long. But to the diva, who didn't understand, she appeared very unreasonable and unforgiving and formidable.

"Indeed you'll not pay my doctor's bill!" she said stubbornly. "I shall have the dog killed." She frowned angrily at Scarlett, who interposed.

"Miss Gail," he said severely, "I beg of you to be sensible. There is no danger from the dog's bite, I assure you. It is unfortunate, of course, but the doctor can dress the wound so you will have no trouble. Please don't distress madame so."

"I have said the dog must die!" snapped Miss Gail again, stubbornly.

"Meestair Scarlett," begged madame, in tears, "you know the yong ladee. Pleez save my babee! I cannot zee him die! I beg of you—*beseech* the yong ladee, Meestair Scarlett——"

"Miss Gail," said Scarlett, more severely, "I should think you could hardly have the heart to wound madame like this and agitate her so. Her constitution and temperament *won't stand it*. You don't realize what it means to her to be upset like this. You really must be sensible. If she keeps her dog safely in her suite, it can harm no one else. Come, be generous!"

Miss Gail was very haughty.

"Very well, Mr. Scarlett," she said at last, through madame's hysterical sobs—madame was having the time of her life taking toll of the sympathy of the

bystanders—"if she keeps it there, I will overlook this because you ask it, although I must say I can't really see that it's any of your affair. But I shall always feel that the dog *should* have been killed. And if I should suffer any serious consequences—well, really—"

After which, she marched away; which was really just as well, as madame promptly flung herself on Scarlett's neck.

"You have save' my babee!" she sobbed. "Oh, Meestair Scarlett, zair iz no thing I will not do to repay! Oh, my babee, my babee! Here, let heem kiss you with hees lit-tle tong! I 'thank you.' You ar-re so good! I cannot thank you all I feel! No—But, yes!" Suddenly she straightened up. With the air of a martyr at last persuaded to renounce the thing she has suffered for, she announced dramatically: "Meestair Scarlett, I will even *zing* for you! Yes! To-day! To-night! I will zing two—*non, four* zongs—er—as we had made arrangement that time," added madame craftily, meaningly. "Better," she cried, suddenly dropping her "babee"—whom she had forgotten in the mad pursuit of a new idea—to clap her hands girlishly, "we will have a gr-rand concert to-night in ze saloon. I will zing for you zen. I will zing, and you can—you can *pass se hat!*" she trilled with sudden laughter. "We will geev ze money," she added, standing very straight and making the most of her opportunity, "to ze wounded of my Fr-rance and my—*husband's* Italy!" She looked very archly at Scarlett.

"You darling, you darling, you darling!" said Scarlett, a little while later in a dark passage, as he was scurrying about scaring up other talent for the "gr-rand concert" before the bell should ring that would spell another mad dash for their respective lifeboats. "How did you ever happen to think of it?"

"I've wanted to tweak the hideous beast all along, anyway," said a honey-sweet voice close to his lips. "I only wish I could have *pincher her!* I—I've been so scared sometimes— She's so— Well, I'm—I'm just plain jealous, I guess. I—I want my—my husband for my—my very own— Oh, Hugh, I can't *breathe!*"

And Scarlett, after a few more preliminaries, finally kissed the little arm whose outermost cuticle had barely been scratched by the dog's little sharp teeth.

It was an imposing assemblage that gathered in the luxurious main saloon to hear the "gr-rand concert." Madame was in splendid spirits, glowing and burning and changing her mind every other second. She was to open and close the concert, and she wore a marvelous white satin gown, with the colors of France draped artistically across her. She stood on a little dais formed by the bottom step of the grand staircase, the little instrument of Scarlett's invention, into which she was to sing, stripped of its oilskins and carefully hidden in the draped, flower-bedecked table before her.

The little instrument made to receive, on what looked like an ordinary record, an hour's entertainment was running smoothly and without noise. Scarlett, exultant, refrained with difficulty from rushing up to Aunt Liz, shaking his fist in her astonished face, making himself known to her, and claiming his own. He pranced about, an alert master of ceremonies. And madame, her voice like a molten silver bell, sang her first song gloriously. If one song was to be worth two hundred more a month and royalties, what would four songs be worth, Scarlett asked himself happily, like a little boy doing sums.

The crowd paid long-continued homage to the most wonderful voice the world had yet produced, when her first

song was ended. Smiling, tossing her head, Carrera began her second song, a gay little dare-devil of an encore. At the height of a wonderful crescendo, a strange, remote, muffled sound seemed to come from the bowels of the steamer. It almost seemed that, in her easy, swinging stride through the water, she missed a step and stumbled. The accompanist played on serenely the daredevilish little accompaniment, but madame stopped singing. She listened, her breast heaving, her eyes staring.

"What was zat?" she asked, in a strangely clear, conversational voice.

A second, and the whole boat shivered, with another subterranean growl, and began to wallow.

Madame Carrera shrieked: "A mine!"

A man groaned: "Torpedoed!"

A moment of silent daze followed, and then, madly shrieking, scurrying like a party of drowning rats, the crowd, led by Carrera, rose and rushed madly up the stairway. The captain and officers suddenly appeared at its head as the crowd surged up. They had drawn pistols.

"Life belts! Life belts!" roared the captain, as one might say, "Steady, steady!" to a fractious horse. There were hoarse shouts of boat numbers and boats and their location, and women and children first.

Suddenly a pair of arms clung about Scarlett's neck, almost strangling him.

"Oh, what must I do? What must I do?" sobbed the pitiful weeping damsel. "Hugh, Hugh, must we die together if we could not live——"

He pushed her from him frantically, a poor little frightened thing.

"Go, go!" he implored, roughly, wildly. "Don't you see there's no time? Go save yourself! Now!"

"I—I can't, Hugh! I won't leave you!"

"Go if you love me! Go, I say!"

"Will—you come—too——"

"Presently, dearest. Go find your boat. Wait for me there."

"If I do, will you come!"

"As soon as I can. Oh, my dearest, don't you see? They wouldn't let me now. The women and children have got to go first. I must wait. I can't go now."

"Hugh, will you come?"

"Oh, my darling, yes. Go, now, go!"

A second she clung to him in that bitterest of things, a last farewell. For though he told her that he would join her soon, Scarlett had a hideous certainty that he would never see her again.

She dashed up the now crazily tilting staircase, through the black swarm of men held back at the top by a line of sailors until the women and children should be cared for. Scarlett saw them crouching back to let her pass. He saw her bright head bobbing among them like a little yellow bubble. He saw her stop a minute to parley, and he covered his face with his hands and turned away. A moment later, followed by an angry order from some one in command, she dashed down the stairs again and called to him loudly:

"Lifeboat No. 5," she said, and pointed pathetically to herself. "Remember—No. 5."

A moment more and she was gone again, looking back over her shoulder.

Like one in a dream, Scarlett bundled up his record and rushed to his cabin. Once there, he did a number of purely mechanical things, staggering about on the tilting floor.

Lifeboat No. 5 had already creaked down into the horrible sea with its precious freight when he rushed out on deck again. Scarlett's stiff lips prayed piteously for his little frightened wife as he stumbled about among the crowding males, buckling on his valuables and life belt. The ship was sinking so fast that all semblance of the order the captain's forethought had made possible at

first had vanished. Suddenly, as if weary of them all and their hoarse cries and their stamping about on her decks, the big ship turned slowly on her side, slipping them off into the sea. There was a long scratching, snatching slide, and then depths and depths of cold water and blackness.

When Scarlett at last felt the closeness of the water lift and cool air on his brow, he fought weakly to keep afloat, but there were so many others fighting for the same thing that, in clearing himself of them, Scarlett sank again. In the terrible blackness when he came up the second time, the cries and commotion were strangely stilled, and in this unearthly stillness a gruff voice cried out, grotesque in the sudden quiet:

"Yur, matey!" and some one seized him by the arm. "Yur's a raft."

A second after Scarlett had reached its haven, something—a board, a spar, a something big and black—rose up out of the sea and struck him a terrific blow on the head.

When Scarlett awoke, it was with the sense of being moved carefully. The first thing he was really conscious of was a glare of strong light. And then a voice spoke that rasped him strangely, grating on his ragged nerves.

"He's been just like that all the time," said the voice. "Atween fever an' daze ever since we pulled him off that old raft the day after the wreck, along with a crazy sailor what thought he wus his baby. He's jest laid there a-countin' sums on his fingers—except once when he sorta roused like. We ast him then fer his name, an' he says first 'Carrera' an' then 'Gail' an' that's all. But these here papers said 'Scarlett'—"

"Yes, I know," said another voice, vaguely familiar. "The paper said last night that you had rescued a man named either Carrera or Gail or Scar-

lett. That's why I came down. We'd given him up for lost."

"Not havin' no wireless, o' course, we couldn't—"

"Yes, I know!"

"These here was all he had on him, barrin' the life belt. I don't reckon you want it—" The voice grew fainter and fainter.

When Scarlett awoke again, he was drinking something pungent that made him catch his breath. He was in a big white bed, and the ambulance that had conveyed him from the dock of the fruit steamer *Mary Ella* had just left Mr. Drake's rather imposing front door.

The first thing Scarlett did was to ask, "And what is your name?" very politely, of the man standing by the bed. Upon being told, he said, "Drake? Drake? Oh-o-o, yes, Drake," and closed his eyes.

Suddenly he started up again.

"Remember," he minced, with a strained smile, "Lifeboat No. 5!" and pointed at himself grotesquely.

"Suppose that was his boat," said a cool professional voice close by.

"I suppose so. We'd sent him to get Carrera's voice for us. She'd promised— But then, poor thing, she'll never sing again."

Scarlett, from his pillows, broke into a pleasant little chuckle.

"I—I got it, too," he said mushily. Then he opened his eyes. "I—did get it," he said, looking crazily at Mr. Drake and nodding.

"That's all right, Scarlett. You did your best," soothed Mr. Drake.

The merciful ice of blank forgetfulness was breaking up fast in Scarlett's hollow eyes, letting in a flood of limpid, pained remembrance. His brain was clearing and becoming rational fast.

"I—got it," he said again, in his queer, hushed voice. "Carrera's—last—song!" He grinned. "Where's my—?" He felt about him blindly. "Those— Where's my—?"

"Let him have them," said the professional voice. "It might help some."

Scarlett took an object swathed in oilskin from the drenched, bedraggled things they gave him. It was a little steel box. He removed an object from the inside, also swathed in oilskins.

"If it's—safe!" he muttered, his weak fingers interfering with one another clumsily.

"That's all right, Scarlett," soothed Drake, though his face was white.

"I tell you—that's—it," stormed Scarlett, suddenly angry. "Get me—a phonograph—you—damn' fool!"

"Good!" said the professional voice decidedly.

"Now, now," said Mr. Drake, but his hands trembled as they hovered over the little object in Scarlett's inert hands.

"You—get me a—phonograph!" cried Scarlett wildly. "Get it! You'll—see—"

"It can do no harm," said the professional voice.

Scarlett slumped back against his pillows. He was very tired, and his bandaged head throbbed. Of a sudden, memory, like a red-hot iron, was searing his brain. It was all coming back so clearly, so hideously. The fashionable crowd this minute—urbane, polite, delighted, applauding; the next—a mad party of shrieking, scurrying demons. And then—and then—his little frail, frightened wife, his little tender wife, clinging to him, kissing him with her desperate young lips. And he had had to be rough with her and to push her off and make her go, and he could not go with her, and she—

Suddenly he spoke to the physician, watching him like a hawk.

"There was a wreck!" he announced.

"Yes."

"There were—lots of—people—lost?"

"Yes."

"Carrera—was she—"

"Lost."

"Was—anybody—saved?"

"Oh, yes, three boatloads."

"Only—three? What were—the—names—"

"I can't remember. Take it easy now, and I'll bring you the list in the paper to-morrow."

"Hell! Tell me *now* the—the numbers of—of the—boats—if you—can!"

"Oh, that's easy. It's all we've read for two weeks. They were numbers six and nine and two."

Scarlett's face was piteously haggard. His bloodshot eyes were wild.

"Not—number—five?"

"No."

"Are you—sure?"

"Sure."

Scarlett's breath sobbed tearfully in his throat.

"*Sure.*"

"Sure."

"Oh, my God!" cried Scarlett, turning away his face.

Weak, terrible tears stole down his cheeks, scalding, burning. It was all so clear now, so clear. Again she stood before him, a little poised figure, ready for that last, mad flight. "Remember, Lifeboat No. 5," her voice called bravely. Again her little white hand pointed to her little white breast. Again she flashed him a valiant, tight-lipped smile— And out there, somewhere in that horrible waste of dark, cold water, his little wife was now. Perhaps, upheld by her life belt, she was bobbing about in hideous sportiveness, her dear bright head golden on the crest of the water. Their wedding, their first kiss, their last, her clinging strength, her courage—it all came back. He thought of her battling out there all alone as he, big and strong, had battled, of her dying out there all alone—

"I—don't want—to—to—live!" whispered Scarlett, as if he could not bear another stinging thought.

And as he spoke, Mr. Drake, who

had returned from below stairs, lifted his eager face from adjusting the phonograph needle, and it began to grit. He drew his breath sharply as the piano introduction tinkled forth from the funnel.

"Why—why—by God——" he stammered. Sweat was on his brow.

He was silenced by Carrera's rich voice, lifted in wonderful song. Noble, inspired, it soared and swelled and faded, a perfect record. There was no other sound in the room, save three shivering sobs from Scarlett, throughout the song. What did it matter that it was a perfect record? What did it matter that a fortune was his? Was not she for whom he had worked and planned lost out there? Could the record or the money give her back?

"It's worth—a—million! Carrera's—last—song!" breathed Mr. Drake at last, dazedly, as if scarcely able to believe his ears, letting the machine grit on and on.

Suddenly he jerked up. Again the piano tinkled out—a light, dare-devil of an accompaniment. Again Madame Carrera's voice sang. It fluted and laughed up to a certain point. Then the needle seemed to skip, and her voice stopped, though the dare-devil little accompaniment continued. Suddenly madame's voice spoke, needle sharp.

"What was zat?" it said distinctly, in a curiously loud and conversational voice.

The needle seemed to skip again and then——

With a hoarse cry, Scarlett sat up in bed, pushing back his hair with his gaunt hands. He remembered in a paralyzing flash that he had forgotten to shut off the phonograph until he snatched it up just before the dash for

his cabin. All the terrible commotion was faithfully recorded. The cry: "A mine!" the groan: "Torpedoed!" the captain's admonishing: "Life belts, life belts," the screams, the rush, the calls—things his own ears had not heard consciously—boomed out of the little funnel.

"Let it—alone! Let—it alone!" blurted Scarlett, as Mr. Drake, realizing what had happened, reached out to stop the machine.

Bolt upright, with clenched fists, Scarlett listened, every raw nerve strained, shrinking from it, yet fascinated by it. Would he hear it again—her voice? Would he? His little wife's voice? And if he did, could he stand it?

It spoke. Again she pleaded, and his own voice answered. Again she implored, and his own voice was rough. Again she begged, and he promised, there on the record.

Scarlett was wringing his wet hands. Could he bear any more? Could he stand to hear those last words again, seeing her so clearly, as he could in his mind, trying to smile at him bravely and making that piteous little gesture?

And then, as clearly as if she were standing beside him now, she did speak again. She called out, with that odd little trailing upward that he loved so dearly.

"Lifeboat number *nine*," she said.

Scarlett gasped. Could he have been mistaken in the noise and confusion? Could he have read her lips rather than her voice? *Was* she safe in that saved No. 9? *Was she?*

And again, as if in answer to his agony of suspense and bewilderment, her voice cried out quite bravely:

"Remember, *number nine!*"





PLAYS AND PLAYERS

By

ALAN DALE

MARRIAGE is a desperate game," quoth some philosopher more than three hundred years ago, and really one cannot doubt it. The game never seems to lose its spice and savor; nobody ever has quite enough of it; it flourishes even in the world's turmoil; plagues, wars, social cataclysms are merely side issues, and soon shelved, but the desperate game remains, and the players amuse us.

The tender, juicy, and optimistic young theatrical season is upon us, long before the appointed time—coy, unsophisticated, and frolicsome as ever—and the favorite theme of marriage, in some of its thousand variations, is once again offered, and not at all diffidently! The stage is as fond of marriage as real life seems to be, though the theater of course disdains conclusions.

At one theatrical entertainment, you may see Lubin and Dulcinea, with all obstacles to their newly found happiness removed, as wedding bells ring. And at the next, you may be asked to laugh and approve marital infidelity, the humors of divorce, or the solemnity of the eternal sex question.

Mr. Belasco loves marriage, as a sort of frivolous pastime in which nice young people—usually called "clean" by dramatic critics—frolic and say bright things. Belasco has varied his views, naturally. There was a time when he looked upon marriage as intensely dra-

matic, and even melodramatic, and perchance—I say perchance—a trifle saucy. But as a man who is a manager ages, he usually returns to his early viewpoints, and that has actually happened to our most illustrious theatrical purveyor. *On revient toujours*, you know, and in English as well as in French.

So Mr. Belasco's first offering on the shrine of the tender, juicy, and optimistic young theatrical season was a new comedy by Roi Cooper Megrue, entitled "Seven Chances," filled to the brim, and even overflowing, with the desperate game. There was a "hero" and there was a "last will and testament." The latter left to the former immense wealth on the condition that there be a happy marriage before the thirtieth birthday. To complicate matters, the "hero" was depicted as being quite uninterested in women, actively opposed to marriage, and addicted to comedy utterances on slight provocation.

Can you imagine how this desperate game is played? If you cannot, then I am sorry for your imaginative apparatus. All sorts of girls are trotted before the fastidious youth for approval. At first they all refuse him, which is so natural, I think—not. He is very rich, but they have ideals, and so on. For a long time he is quite unable to find a wife.

That phase of the stage's idea of

marriage always appeals to my sense of humor. In real life, there always seem to be more girls than boys, and the girls are much more anxious to secure husbands than the boys are to find wives. In real life, girls are educated, garbed, and primed, for the event of marriage, and they seldom reject anything eligible. Oh, I know that sounds horrid, but isn't it true? On the stage, a girl is shocked when she is kissed; in real life, she is shocked when she isn't. In the theater, the girl never guesses when she is loved; in real life, she has no idle doubts. I admit, to the credit of the stage, that it still fights valiantly for the idea that Lubin is the pursuer and Dulcinea the pursued.

In "Seven Chances," the "hero" has a difficult time finding a wife—and he has to discover one at almost a moment's notice—but finally he succeeds. Of course, the charmer loves him for himself and doesn't care at all about money. They never do!

The piece is fluffy and frivolous—just the sort of marriage game that is "popular" at this precise moment. For the game has its "fashions" and its mutabilities and its vacillations. It is fluffy and frivolous now, because not long ago it was solemn and subtle and full of interrogation marks.

Nobody plays the marriage game as prettily as Mr. Belasco. He is an adept at securing nice, wholesome people who suggest youth and buoyant spirits. His women are "cute" without being silly, and his men are the kind who look well in white flannels and "sport" coats. In "Seven Chances" there were Frank Craven—chosen because he was a "type" of the disgruntled "hero"—Otto Kruger, Hayward Ginn, Charles Brokate, Anne Meredith, Carroll McComas, Beverly West, and Lillian Spencer; also many others. Most of them were plied with lines on the subject of marriage, and Mr. Roi Cooper Megrue was at

his best in furnishing those lines. You see, the topic is inexhaustible. It has no limitations. The only thing to do in comedy is to make the epigrams simple, and in drama to make them complicated. Epigrams there must be, for the marriage plays must be "clever," and there is nothing like an epigram to suggest that necessary quality. Even if the scene take place at the breakfast table, all the characters must utter their epigrams—which is *so* natural! In real life, the mere notion of speaking an epigram as you crack a boiled egg is revolting.

Mr. A. H. Woods thrust upon the immature season a marriage farce called "His Bridal Night," and the mere title attracted considerable attention. The name of the piece was looked upon as most daring—I don't know why. Bridal nights are perfectly respectable, and they have been in vogue for centuries. They are the natural sequence to bridal days, but we always hope for the worst!

This was another fluffy little marriage play, delectably unplausible and not a bit desperate. Imagine two lovely girls so much alike that a man goes away on his honeymoon with the charmer he *hasn't* married. All the ingenuity of Mr. Lawrence Rising, complicated with all the technical knowledge of Miss Margaret Mayo, who wrote "Baby Mine" and "Twin Beds," was directed to the task of leading up to that one situation. To make it conceivable to the theater mind—which means that it may be quite inconceivable to the nontheater mind—that a man could rush away with the wrong woman was the playwright's stimulating idea.

In "His Bridal Night," the marriage game was extremely jocund and thistle-down. The two pretty girls, the young husband, and a lover were busy all the time, catering to the marriage mind that every well-seasoned theatergoer carries

around with him and never checks at the box office. It was all eminently "proper," we were bound to agree. It was a farce with several doors, and one door led to a bedroom, which *might* have been improper—said we to ourselves, said we. Not a blush, I assure you.

As "stars" in this rather puerile farce, we perceived those charming musical-comedy lassies, breathing souvenirs of the Winter Garden, known as "the Dolly Sisters." That they had achieved their reputation by dancing did not make any difference. They were asked to act, and they did the best they could, like nice, docile girls. In farce that verged on the old Palais Royal brand, considerable chic and a certain subtlety seemed necessary, but those qualities we did not get, and did not expect. The Dolly Sisters looked very pretty indeed, and to make us feel that they sympathized with us, they introduced their popular dances and saved a situation that trembled once or twice.

Another contribution to the desperate game was an affair set forth as a "flirtation," entitled "Please Help Emily," at the Lyceum Theater. This was one of those comedies—politely, I say "comedies"—that the young critic loves to call "frisky." I would just as soon call shredded wheat or toasted corn-flakes frisky, but the young critic may be pardoned.

In this comedy, the "heroine" actually appears in pajamas and in a bathing suit, so the "frisky" attitude is at least intelligible. In the days when pajamas were young—that is to say, in the days of pretty little Pauline Chase—there was something rather revolutionary in their idea. The pajama suit was a revolt from the old-fashioned "nightie," and as such it was entitled to consideration. The musical-comedy girl in pajamas really obviated all necessity for the production of certain Shakespearian plays, with doublet and

hose in them. Therefore, she was very useful. Half the actresses who adore *Rosalind* would be less enthusiastic if that foolishly arch young woman occurred in the Forest of Arden in long gowns!

However, Miss Ann Murdock, who was the star in "Please Help Emily," had no senseless doubts. She was pajamaed and she was bathing-suited, and she went alone to a young man's rooms. She played the marriage game as the stage ingénue loves to play it, and she worked extremely hard at the job. Miss Murdock is nice to look upon in her simple billieburkian way, and she is so sure of herself that she impresses her audience with a certain amount of confidence.

H. M. Harwood wrote "Please Help Emily," and the many admirers of Miss Murdock, who is a clever girl, did their best to "please help" Harwood to get away with his difficult proposition. Marriage was discussed in all its theatrical vagaries—almost as if there were nothing else in the world, and we left Emily on the sublime brink of living happily ever after. Poor Emily! Also, poor Emily's husband! The pajamas and the bathing suit, as adjuncts to the marriage game, may be lacking in delicacy, perhaps, but every girl who is a star loves to make it perfectly clear to the audience that she *can* wear them if necessary. It is an innocuous stage foible, and need not be discussed abstrusely. Later on, if Miss Murdock should cast an avid eye at the rôle of *Rosalind*, we shall at least feel secure in the knowledge that the Forest of Arden will not be without its appeal. Any girl who can successfully wear a bathing suit can play *Rosalind*—or at least that seems to be the stage convention.

Miss Murdock was aided by Charles Cherry, who was once a picturesque "young lover," and who must continue to be so until he falls by the wayside.

The stage labels an actor, and the actor must wear the label, willy-nilly. Perhaps this is a good thing, inasmuch as it gives the actor a chance to be not himself.

Two melodramas, dark green and ponderous, attacked the marriage game from other angles. These were "The Silent Witness" and "The Guilty Man." In each, a sweet girl had been betrayed and abandoned, though motherhood was imminent. On the stage, as I think I've said before, the only women who rejoice in bearing children are those who are not married, and then only for the sake of dramatic argument.

In "The Silent Witness," the illegitimate child is a boy; in "The Guilty Man," it is a girl. Each play is nicely fitted with the courtroom that the playwright adores. In each play, the erring father is the prosecutor of his own child. In each play, the agony is laid out thickly, and the "tensity" is opaque. In each play, the crucial moment occurs when the father and mother are brought—face to face!

In these plays, it was the delay of the marriage game that caused all the anguish. Man's perfidy and woman's worse than weakness, as they used to say in the penny dreadfuls when I was a laughing lad! In "The Guilty Man," many good old plays were suggested, with almost fantastic insistency. I thought of dear old "Camille," of "La Tosca," of "Common Clay," of "Madame X," of "Maternity," and of "The Silent Witness," because the last was produced ahead of "The Guilty Man."

Of course it was very early in the season to be thrilled, and the weather at that time was distinctly against the thrill as a luxury. We really only take to melodrama when the season is far advanced, and usually reject it when the thermometer is reckless, as it was when "The Guilty Man" and "The Silent Witness" were presented. Both plays made us wish that the marriage game

had *not* been delayed, and that those poor children had been properly fathered and mothered before the dramas opened. It would have saved such bitter doings, and have redeemed us from the courtrooms with all solemnity.

In "The Silent Witness," there was no star, which was a circumstance in favor of the play; in "The Guilty Man," there was Miss Irene Fenwick, a young woman who affects the pellucid in her manner. However, though she was the star, she was not the best actress. That honor went to Miss Emily Ann Wellman, an artist whose work is destined to become better known, if I am any judge. Miss Wellman, both as the girl who was "deceived" and as the mother, eighteen years later, was really admirable. Only a woman who is not a star will condescend to be eighteen years older at the end of a play than she was at the beginning. Miss Fenwick wasn't born when the play started, so the joy of being aggressively young was hers. It is a joy that every star covets and hates to forego.

The marriage game was played in "Broadway and Buttermilk" precisely as you would expect it to be played in considering the play's title. It had its solemn moments, when the beautiful milliner attempted to save the dear little rustic maiden from the ever-loved "false step," but as the milliner was played by Miss Blanche Ring, who burst into song whenever things palled upon her, the play need not be considered in any seriousness.

As for "The Happy Ending"—which shall be mine for the present—it dealt with the hereafter from the spiritualistic standpoint, and was very artistically offered by Mr. Arthur Hopkins, but it occurred in the very warm weather when the "here" was so oppressive that the "hereafter"—as judged by the old orthodox notions—could scarcely have been any warmer! And it ended!

Ainslee's Open Door

In Defense of Mrs. Lot and Xanthippe

HISTORY, sacred and profane, has been hard on the wives of Lot and Socrates, one set up forever as a salty symbol of unlawful curiosity, the other coming down through the centuries as an archetype of peppery shrew. It is high time these two ladies were defended from careless and inconsequent detractors. Not that we are in a position to speak with more authority than the aforesaid carpers, but from long reflection upon internal evidence, we have reached a conclusion totally at odds with the historic traditions regarding Mrs. Lot and Xanthippe.

First, we believe that the biblical lady, to whom but one line is vouchsafed in the Scriptures, was essentially a home-loving body, far removed from the super-woman type, who was unfortunate enough to meet with greater punishment than she deserved. Accepted as such, it was inevitable that Mrs. Lot should cast that "longing, lingering look behind" at her homestead, given to the flames through no fault of hers. From her viewpoint, it must have seemed indeed poor thanks for her hospitality to the stranger guests that she be turned and burned out of house and home. And, to crown the indignity, to be forbidden to *dare* look back at her Lares and Penates bonfire under penalty of dire punishment! It was more than should have been exacted or expected of any human housewife.

Mrs. Lot might well have reasoned, too, that guests with such supernatural powers as hers possessed should at least, with a word, have transported her home through the air to a new site. Whatever her thoughts were, however, we venture to say that her fatal glance was not of anger or reproach at the work of the divine fire, but was doubtless in the nature of a last, tender farewell to the spot she loved best on earth. That Lot himself did not look back is not particularly to his credit, for he was probably taken up with plans for future real estate in Zoar, whither he desired to go. But poor Mrs. Lot, like any other good housekeeper, thought solely of her beloved home consigned to such summary destruction. Hence followed her famous glance backward. And for this was she doomed to be transformed into a pillar of salt, as a warning to disobedient wives! Rather, should she not be held as a martyr to love of home? Perhaps, if we were more clever as mythologists or philologists, we would be able to prove that Mrs. Lot really symbolizes grief, a Genesis Niobe, the allusion to the salt pillar being merely a figure of speech for her incessant tears.

As for Mrs. Socrates, she was not punished by being changed into anything save a sorely tried wife; and, after all, perhaps her lot—no pun intended—were harder to bear. The biblical lady was certainly rid of her troubles at a stroke, but Xanthippe, of pagan grace, had to put up with a shiftless husband for many trying years. Shiftless? Yes, dear old Socrates was nothing else in her eyes. When she married him, he was a promising sculptor, but his "dæmon," as he called it, soon took possession of him, and bade him go about the streets of Athens to wrangle and argue with any Tom, Dick, or Harry who would consent to exchange words with him. Did he not leave her to take care of the children as best she

could, while he calmly meandered about splitting verbal hairs, sometimes varying his pedestrianism with a trancelike pose for hours in the market place, or attending all-night banquets with a lot of young wastrels?

Is it any wonder, then, that the neglected Xanthippe gave her lord a piece of her peppery tongue every time he deigned to show up at home? Surely he must have been what is familiarly known as "a poor provider," and Xanthippe was justified in showing him the door whenever he chanced to recall that he had a family. Chroniclers and historians have been silent on the subject, but we have often secretly imagined that Xanthippe had to go out washing for a living, perhaps, or take in a few lodgers. Who knows? Plato, to be sure, could have enlightened us, but he had little sympathy with women, and was too busy making of Socrates a saint and a hero. Strange that it should remain for us to make out a case for the maligned and misunderstood wife of the great Greek philosopher!

D. E. W.

John Bull and the Office Girl

STAID old John Bull's business houses are being transformed by the war—and, my word, what a time he is having! The office girl, in particular, is the subject of his gravest consideration. Maisie and Rose and Dollie are smartly dressed and coiffed, we learn, and wear the latest word in hats. They have pluck and endurance and a "fine spirit of patriotism that carries them over all difficulties." But—the whole truth and nothing but the truth will do; so the *London Globe*, called to the stand, blurts out that the office girl "as she is often seen" is "light, pretty, and frivolously incompetent, minus ambition, and doing as little work as possible, because, after all, why worry? It's only for a time."

The *Globe* further testifies that the shining ideal set forth in a treatise now listed among London's best sellers, "The Business Girl's Handbook," is a chimera; and the leader writer hazards that it would be better for the employer to pin his faith upon dictophones and duplicators, addressographs, adding machines, and suchlike labor-saving devices. For, take stock of Miss Maisie, and she usually grades in efficiency at "something like forty-five per cent."

True enough! But what was Jimmie's batting average in the first few weeks of the season, or Bill's, or angel-faced Alfred's? John, old dear, you'd do well to accept a bit of advice on Maisie from your Cousin Jonathan. Maisie is new to the job, and doubtless will improve on it if you can manage to keep patient a while. That she is frivolous can't be denied, nor even that she shirks. But the same was true of Jimmie and Bill and angel-faced Alfred. Better thank your stars, John, that Maisie is pretty—recalling Jimmie's and Bill's black eyes—and that she doesn't shoot craps in alleyways or imitate Charlie Chaplin. She loiters before the alluring windows of the milliner's shop, but not nearly so long as Alfred used to loiter before the sport bulletins in front of newspaper offices. Maisie will learn politeness far more quickly than any boy you ever hired; she will be more grateful for an occasional word of praise; and, in the long run, she will cover twice as much ground on errand duty.

Meanwhile, John, let nothing deter you from laying in some of those labor-saving devices of which the *Globe* speaks in terms so vague and respectful. A few years ago, when we had the pleasure of looking in on you during business hours, it occurred to us that no richer field for the salesman of such devices could be discovered than your headquarters in London. You were then acquiring proud familiarity with typewriting machines, and becoming almost reconciled to in-

stalling more than one telephone to a suite. We counted several vertical files in the City, one of them steel, and met a man who had heard of the addressograph. Go to it, John, duplicators, adding machines, dictographs, and all. Take the plunge and emerge a regular business man!

C. P. C.

The Wabbling Cost of Living

SHOES, sevenpence the pair; firewood, two dollars the bundle; fat fowls, one penny each; beef and mutton, a penny the pound. Woolen cloth, one-dollar-twenty the yard."

No, it is not a Utopian dream. It is a copy of a genuine price list. Here is another:

"Eggs, twenty-five cents the bushel; whisky, twenty-four cents the gallon; prime meat, three cents the pound; salt, ten cents the pound; best calico, one dollar—and one-dollar-ten—the yard."

The first list prevailed in England in the sixteenth century. During the ensuing hundred years, prices doubled and wages remained stationary. Wages, by the way, varied from two cents a day to seven or eightpence. The former wage was paid only to the most unskilled workers; viz: "Jack shall have but a penny a day, because he can't work any faster." Workmen wore leathern clothes, because the best leather cost so much less than the cheapest cloth.

The second list is copied from the ledger of a Pennsylvania country store, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. We, who moan at the high cost of living, dream gloatingly of those good old days when eggs were a quarter per bushel, and plump fowls were a penny apiece, and shoes sevenpence, and whisky—well, and all the rest of the impossible bargains. But there is a "joker" in the bill. Our ancestors would have wept with delight at the impossible hope of getting calico, wool, silk, linen, and so forth, at the low prices we pay for them—even under Schedule K. That a barrel of salt could one day be bought for less money than they paid for a peck of it would have seemed unbelievable. And so on down the list, of which only a few stray items have here been quoted.

The cost of living—now, as then—is not merely high; it is wabbly as well. All things must be measured by comparison. And we—who pay forty-eight cents a dozen for eggs and thirty cents a pound for chicken—buy cloth and salt and tinware and silver articles and furniture, and so forth, at prices that would have seemed miraculously low in the time of our grandparents. May not the price-harassed housewife of 1991 be reasonably expected to envy us our dirt-cheap forty-eight-cent eggs, and to pity us for having had to pay the exorbitant sum of five cents a cake for kitchen soap?

A. P. T.

The Consoling Harmonica

WE who can retrace our steps back to the "green, enchanted forest of boyhood" were not a little touched the other day to read of the devotion of Tommy Atkins to the mouth organ. It is the one article of his equipment, says a writer who has served in the trenches in Flanders, that Tommy keeps dry and clean and shining. "A broken rifle was of no concern—another was easily obtainable; but a ruined mouth organ was nothing short of a calamity." Though his khaki uniform be caked with mud, his rifle and bayonet rusty, his ammunition clips gritty with dirt, Tommy takes care that his vest-pocket orchestra is always in dress-parade order. He concedes that high explosives and machine

guns and plenty of ammunition are important, but he stoutly maintains that "mouth organs is wot's go'n' to win the war."

Why? Because they are his solace and delight—they put heart in him. "I can say," relates James N. Hall, in no less serious a publication than the *Atlantic Monthly*, "that they saved many a man from losing his grip upon himself during moments when the strain of 'sitting tight' was almost unbearable."

How many of the rest of us have mouth organs blessed in the same fashion? We can recall with deep gratitude many an occasion when the music of a harmonica has brightened the murkier hours of youth. It has shaken the curse of loneliness from dreary trails, made camp fires as homy as hearthsides, and soothed us in weariness and distress. Men grow up and affect to scorn the mouth organ; but deep in the hearts of all of us is boyhood—"our true base," says Stevenson; "not only the beginning, but the perennial spring of our faculties"—and boyhood exalts the harmonica above all the musical instruments of creation.

The mouth organ is the most democratic music maker of modern times, and a man who is not ashamed to own his affection for it is one who is not ashamed of a young heart. The harmonica's cheapness, lightness, and companionability make it ideal for the trenches; but many a grown man who never has shouldered an army rifle prizes it almost as highly as the campaigner does. Long before the war, a poet made a lyric on its virtues—Robert W. Service, in "The Song of the Mouth Organ:"

I'm a humble little bit of tin and horn;
I'm a byword, I'm a plaything, I'm a jest;
The virtuoso looks on me with scorn;
But there's times when I am better than the best.
Ask the stoker and the sailor of the sea;
Ask the mucker and the hewer of the pine;
Ask the herder of the plain, ask the gleaner of the grain—
There's a lowly, loving kingdom—and it's mine.

We wish the poet could find additional inspiration in Soldier Hall's paragraphs from Flanders and add a stanza on the harmonica of Tommy Atkins
C. P. C.



Talks With Ainslee's Readers

ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE, whose "Stories of the Superwomen" have attracted so much attention, contributes the complete novelette to the next number of AINSLEE'S. In "The Duel," Mr. Terhune has brilliantly depicted the encounter of wits between a cynical old New York aristocrat, who sets family and tradition above everything, and the attractive daughter of a self-made millionaire. The unconscious object of their subtle mind fencing is a grandson whom the old aristocrat has painstakingly reared to be worthy of the family position when he himself shall have passed away.

The heroine, having had to rely entirely for her ideas of the social world upon the prevalent type of "society" fiction, is ever on the lookout for evil motives. She is the sort of girl who is apt to prove her distrust by assuring a man, "You know I trust you." In spite of this, she is ultimately able to convince even her cynical old antagonist that "she *must* have had an ancestor."

"The Duel" is a powerful story, with keen characterization and sparkling dialogue.

HOW many men can accept an attractive young woman's unconventional comradeship in the spirit in which it is offered? If we are to judge by the sprightly episodes that Bonnie R. Ginger has pictured for us, the answer seems to be "About One Out of Four." That is the title of her story.

Other short fiction in the December AINSLEE'S includes "Kitchen Mechanics," a gay little love story in which Joseph Ernest shows the impartiality

with which Cupid flutters about between "upstairs" and the kitchen; "The Asra," a most unusual and dramatic tale by Stanley Olmsted; "Heredity Jane," by Nina Wilcox Putnam; and "Bill Heenan, Arbitrator," by William Slavens McNutt.

We know from your letters of inquiry that nothing could be more welcome to readers of AINSLEE'S than the return of our old friend, *Bill Heenan*. When are we going to print more about him? What back numbers contained stories about him?—from those who were afraid they had missed some. Is *Bill Heenan* a real character? This last question we put to the author himself some time ago.

"Our gigantic old friend, *Bill Heenan*," Mr. McNutt told us, "is drawn from my wife's uncle, Sam Gowan, of Alaska at large. In depicting *Heenan* physically, I have always tried to give a correct description of Sam. In the situations arising in my stories, I have always tried to have *Heenan* act as Sam would have acted under like circumstances. Temperamentally, Sam Gowan always seemed to me the incarnation of the wild, restless, morally careless, yet ruggedly moral, adventurous, devil-may-care spirit that has shouldered the American frontier into the Pacific Ocean on the west, and is even now engaged in shoving it out of Alaska into the Arctic Ocean on the north.

"When Sam was ten years old, he left his native Maine to cross the Continent by prairie schooner to join his father, who had rounded the Horn years earlier and was engaged in the lumber business in California. When

he was twelve, he was near enough man's size to take his place as a man in the woods. Then, after several years in California logging camps and cattle ranches, with a chance companion and a couple of pack horses, he meandered leisurely eastward, and landed in the Black Hills of Dakota at the height of the Indian troubles. For a time he did duty as Indian fighter, hunter, scout, and horse breaker.

"Then the lure of the setting sun got into his veins again, and he returned to California. But California, by that time, was getting too populous to suit his frontier nature, and he worked his way northward from logging camp to mine, from mine to ranch, from ranch to trapper's cabin, through Oregon and Washington, where he heard of the land—then almost mythical—known as Alaska, where game was plentiful and people few. With one partner, he made his way by boat up the Inside Passage to British Columbia, and, after a year or more, on into Alaska.

"That was over thirty-five years ago, and since that time he has been out of the territories of Alaska and Yukon but twice—once to Prince Rupert, and once to Victoria, British Columbia. But he is never happy away from the wilds.

"In the early days, he went all over Alaska as trapper, hunter, miner, and prospector. During his latter years, he made considerable money in business ventures in Wrangle, of which he was

mayor at the time of the Klondike rush, and Ketchikan, and later in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, when that town was first started. Having no particular use for what he made, he disposed of it as fast as it came in.

"I heard of him a year or so ago up in the Yukon, and later there was a rumor that he was out on the Pribiloff Islands."

The sedentary life of an author has not kept Mr. McNutt from appreciating the unconventional exploits of his hero. For a time after leaving college, he was an actor. Then he went up to Alaska "bohunking it," and did a little of everything—miner, lumberjack, deck hand, longshoreman, speculator, storekeeper, fisherman, and deputy. After another stretch on the stage, he again went back to Alaska, working in various capacities. But his chief profession, since he first appeared in AINSLEE's, has been writing.

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FRIENDS made by "The Unspeakable Perk," whom Samuel Hopkins Adams introduced to AINSLEE's, will not be surprised to learn that he is now achieving prominence in the social affairs of the book world. His name has been mentioned "among those present" at several of the six-best-seller gatherings in various parts of the country.





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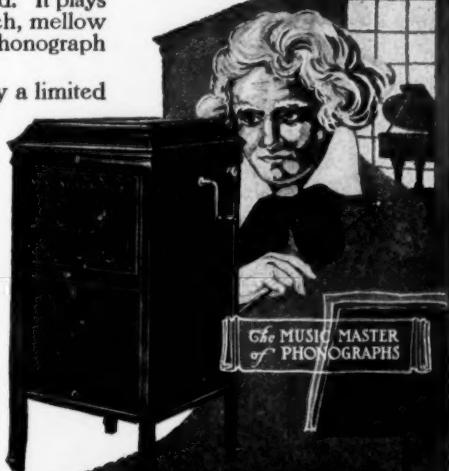
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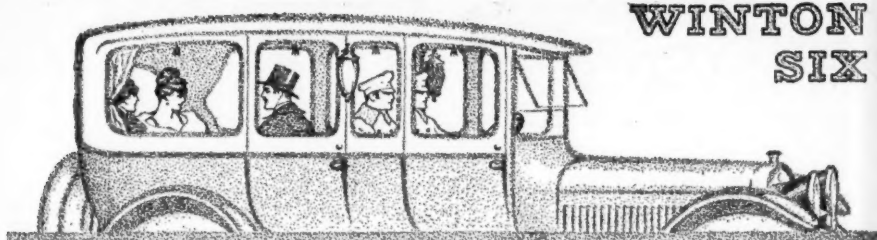
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Add the water to the molasses. Mix together the flour, baking powder, salt and spices and sift them into a bowl. Add the molasses and lard and mix thoroughly. Turn into a floured and greased tin and bake in a moderate oven for 40 minutes.

Cocoanut Cookies

Take one cupful of sugar, two eggs, one cupful of cream, one tablespoonful of Swift's Silverleaf Lard, one-half cupful of chopped cocoanut, three cupfuls of flour, three teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one-half teaspoonful of salt, and one-half teaspoonful of lemon extract. Beat up the eggs until light, add the lard and sugar and beat for five minutes. Add the lemon extract, cream, cocoanut and flour, baking powder and salt sifted together. Put the dough in cool place for twenty minutes. Roll out to one-fourth inch in thickness. Cut with a round cutter and bake in a moderate oven for ten minutes.

These recipes by Marion Harris Neil, Cooking Expert of *Pictorial Review Magazine*

Swift & Company, U. S. A.



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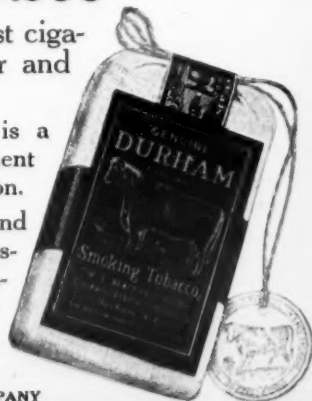
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